# JEEVADHARA

# SEEKING ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

**Edited by**

**Mathew Illathuparampil**

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# Editorial

The search for alternative lifestyles is on move around the world. Those who scorn the conventional lifestyles engage in various attempts to push forward what they think of better alternatives. For example, those who condemn the excesses of neo-liberal capitalism and the world of hyper-consumption propose to return to poverty as a way of radical living. In the West, there are also people who bypass social institutions such as families, schools, jobs and occupy houses and set up social centers from where to promote values such as anti-racism or anti-fascism. They hold protest demonstrations and alternative free-time activities; they organize courses, dance at concerts; drink, take drugs, etc. Apart from these bohemian kinds of experiments, there have been many valuable attempts in the world in seeking alternative approach to life and reality. For instance, alternative medicine, alternative energy sources, alternative education, etc.

In the wake of the search for alternatives in various aspects of life, this issue of *Jeevadhara* tries to offer a few alternative approaches to being a Christian today. One can be a Christian in many different ways. Not only the expressions of Orthodoxy (in the generous sense), but also the demands of Orthopraxis would be greatly conditioned by socio-cultural and philosophical factors. Therefore, the demands of being a Christian have always been under reconsideration and the quest for renewed understanding. Even if people did not spell it out in that way, for example, saints were proving alternative lifestyle of holiness and theologians in many cases were proposing alternative vision of being a Christian, being a church, etc.

Alternative ways of being a Christian would surely imply alternative theological approaches. They are not opposite theologies rather they are

suggestions for better substitutes, refined versions or more sensitive approaches to certain realities. It is an attempt at asking the question whether something else is possible. Examples abound in the history of theology to suggest that it has always been searching for alternative approaches. In its relations to the state or the world at large, the church sought alternative models in different times. Contrary to the so far prevalent approaches, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the American churches made central to their self-understanding a critique of the exploitation of workers in the newly industrializing cities. The "social gospel movement" emerged in the early 20th century in Europe as an alternative approach to the social question. Theological attempts to fight racism, classism, and sexism in our society are expressions to walk away from the dominant cultural patterns crept into theological corpus.

This issue of *Jeevadhara* focuses on five areas where alternative theological approaches are possible concerning various aspects of living our Christian faith. Dr. Vincent Kundukulam explores the alternative ways of interpreting Jesus in the present postmodern milieu. Dr. Mathew Illathuparampil proposes certain alternative concerns in doing theology. They include the role of human experience in theology, contextuality of theology, the function of theology's prophetic imagination, and the reception of theology. Dr. Shalini Mulackal rethinks the existing pattern of man-woman relationship and outlines an alternative paradigm which is closer to the gospel message. Religious life in the Indian church as a whole is very much flourishing. Dr. Louis Malieckal suggests the chosen values of an alternative to the existing, much institutionalized religious lifestyle. They include simplicity of life-style, transparency in dealings, communion of members, frugality in spending and solidarity with the marginalized. Everybody would agree that the current predominant approach to nature marked by exploitation must find sustainable alternatives. Dr. Antony Mookenthottam in his contribution proposes four alternative kinds of relationships with nature in a seminal form. They are holistic, mystical approaches and relationships based on love and unity, service and gratitude.

**Mathew Illathuparampil**

# Jesus, an Alternative:
# A Postmodern Search

## Vincent Kundukulam

Any attempt to map alternative ways of being a Christian
today cannot but look to Jesus who in his earthly life posed
alternative approaches to God, human beings and nature.
Dr. Vincent Kundukulam, professor of dogmatic theology at
St. Joseph Pontifical Seminary, Mangalapuzha, Aluva, in this
work explores how Jesus became the supreme alternative.
The author uses the context and terminology of
postmodernism, especially the Derridian notion of
deconstruction. He proves that Jesus deconstructed many of
the then prevailing concepts and lifestyles. He illustrates how
Jesus offered alternative visions about God, power and
identity. If we take this 'theological' (actually deconstructive)
method of Jesus seriously, it will force the church to build
more authentic Christian communities.

## Introduction

The post-World War era witnessed radical changes in the life style
of the people in the developed countries. Thinkers felt that Western society
was going through a significant break with the ideas associated with
modernity. Therefore they ceased to call this era simply 'modern' and
began to add the prefix "post" to mark an entry into a new realm of
experience.

Post-modernity stands for thought patterns, cultural traits and
lifestyles different from that of modernity. Reason, which had been the

crowning achievement of modernity, has been driven into exile. People began to resist the political and religious authorities and defend the individuality of the person. Technology is confronted with ecological disasters. Everyone desires everything and tries to get whatever s/he likes. Such a freedom makes people mutual rivals, and in the end, none is free. The postmodern culture raises serious challenges also to the Christian faith. Being a grand narrative, Christianity loses its grip over social life. Its values like tradition and commitment are attacked.

Post-War culture generates diverse reactions among the Christian thinkers. Some are afraid. Some others becomedefensive to this ever changing culture and return to the 'Golden Age of Faith.' There are still others who are optimistic in their approach. How to be an authentic Christian in this era is a relevant question. As far as Christians are concerned, the best solution is to get back to Jesus, our founding Myth. Jesus of Nazareth, God-Man is an alternative prophet in the footsteps of John the Baptist. Relying upon him will not be in vain.

To look at Christ from the postmodern perspective,to find in him ways to respond to the challenges of postmodernity is an ambitious project in this brief article. Our objective here would be therefore modest. We will reflect over Derrida's deconstructive way of reading the texts and see whether Jesus' own way of interpreting the religious and social presuppositions can elicit new paths of being genuine Christian today.

## 1. Derrida and meaning of language

Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) is one of the most discussed postmodern thinkers. Among the various debated themes of this very complex writer,the concept that earned universal attention is deconstruction, a theme he developed to understand the meaning of a text.Throughout his books Derrida questions the itinerary of the meaning of language. Traditionally the meaning of a term is fixed according to the 'metaphysics of presence'(expression borrowed from Heidegger). Heidegger understands being as 'presence.' Derrida applies this concept of presence in a very different manner to the understanding of signs in language. Let us see how he proposes an alternative interpretation to the

process of acquiring authentic knowledge through the concepts of presence, différance and deconstruction.

### 1.1. Presence

According to Western thought, the meaning of a text is derived from the play of three components: signifier, signified and the referent. The signifier is the material element of a language whether spoken or written. The signified is its conceptual meaning. And the referent is that which serves as the reference of meaning, known in the Western culture, as logo-centrism or metaphysics of presence. It is the ultimate self-certifying and self-sufficient ground that is directly present to our awareness outside the play of language and which serves to organize the linguistic system and as a result fix the meaning of any spoken or written utterance.

To Derrida, such attempt of Western philosophy to establish an absolute ground for presence and to rely on it for the comprehension of language are bound to fail. He claims that the features that serve to found the signified meaning of a word are never present to us in their positive identity because they are nothing other than a network of differences. In his view, the signifier and the signified do not owe their apparent identities to their own inherent features but to their differences from other speech sounds, written marks or conceptual significations. In any utterance the apparent meaning is the result of a self-effacing trace which consists of the non-present differences from other elements, yet keeping a meaning in its own right.[1]

Thus for Derrida, what determines the meaning of language is what the text gives us in the *present*.The reader cannot get beyond verbal signs to any things-in-themselves which might serve to anchor its meaning. "*Il n' y a rien hors du text*" (there is no outside the text) – is Derrida's slogan. /.nd the *present* meaning is initiated by a power of dispersion which never disposes itself to the present. The meaning is expressed through the pair of signifier and signified. The signifier refers

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[1]  M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary terms*, Akash Press, New Delhi, 2005, p. 68.

to a signified presence, which embody a full presence of the reference. Only when one tries to think of the signified, he realizes that he does it only in the order of signs. The meaning remains ever deferred, on account of the playthat Derrida calls différance.Hence we can never in any instance have a demonstrably decidable meaning.[2]

### 1.2. Differance

Derrida explains this differential play (*jeu*) of language by the special term "différence". In philosophy, 'difference' denotes relationship of otherness between things that are identical. It is also used to distinguish one species from other species of the same genus. Derrida's concept of difference,on the other hand,assembles together two meanings of the French verb *differer*: to be different and to defer.Thus it involves two movements: one that produces the present sense by putting apart other meanings, and the other which delays the presence.[3]

According to this phenomenon a text proffers the effect of having a significance which is the product of its difference, but at the same time, this proffered significance never comes to rest in an actual presence i.e., its determinate specification is deferred from one linguistic interpretation to another in a movement or play in an endless regress. In other words, the meaning of any utterance is ineluctably disseminated – dispersing meaning among innumerable alternatives while negating any specific meaning. Thus there is no ground for attributing a decidable meaning to a text. The absence of a "transcendental signified" extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely. There is no final or correct reading of a text; any reading generates a supplementary reading. Differance unsettles permanently the binary oppositions, which make usually the meaning of a text possible according to structuralism.[4]

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida says that the main reason to change the "e"into "a" (cf différance) is the need to express the active nature of

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[2]  Jean Grondain, *L'Hermeneutique* (Collection– *Que sais-je ?*), PUF, Paris, 2006, pp. 93-94.

[3]  *Encyclopédie philosophique universelle : II Les notions philosophiques*, André Jacob (ed.), PUF, Paris, 1990, p. 656.

[4]  M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary terms*, pp. 68-69.

the production of difference.[5] Différance is not a process of appropriation; but a dynamic act. It is the activity of differing, which keeps the being without permitting the difference expired. It keeps the meaning float, and never allows it to remain in rest. If the meaning of language is permanently deferred how can a reader get into the sense of the text?Man is basically saturated by traditional logo-centric conceptions. In that case, is it possible for him to get out of his preconceived notions regarding the language? 'It is possible,' says Derrida,bydecoding the binary oppositions implied in language.

### 1.3. Process of Deconstruction

Derrida developed his most discussed concept of deconstruction in *Of Grammatology*.If the reader is the first bearer of the meaning of a written text, he must first be freed from preconceived ideas of the author. This requires mental work to remove one by one the presuppositions of representations inherent in the text. Deconstruction thus denotes the whole set of techniques and strategies used by Derrida to destabilize the "applied ideals" in the texts.[6]

The process of deconstruction attacks the fundamental binaries of metaphysics. According to metaphysics, there exist the hierarchical oppositions such as: inside / outside, interior / exterior, subject / object, active / passive, present / absent etc., which help us to distinguish between what is proper and improper. According to Derrida, such metaphysical statements are binary prejudices of an era which are transported in time because of the special interests of corporations. By deconstruction Derrida aims to undermine these hierarchical oppositions.[7] It involves the subversion of a structure and the dispersion of closing the meaning of speech. As a result, the deconstructed term becomes a kind of

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[5] Françoise Dastur, 'Heidegger, Derrida et la question de la différance', in : *Derrida, la tradition de la philosophie*, Marc Crépon et Frédéric Worms (eds.), Galilée, Paris, 2008, pp. 102-104.

[6] Vincent Houillon, 'Derrida Jacques', in: *Dictionnaire de philosophie*, Jean-Pierre Zarader (ed.), Ellipses, Paris, 2007, p. 146.

[7] Sylviane Agacinski, 'Derrida Jacques', *Dictionnaire des philosophes*, Denis Huisman (ed.), PUF, Paris, 1984, p. 713.

undecidable notion compared to the binary logic from which it is emerged. Naturally it weakens the hierarchy of meaning. Everything is secondary. There is no meaning like the first or the immediate.

All those who try to explain the phenomenon of deconstruction take the precaution not to define it directly and positively. Here follows a few examples.

"The deconstruction is not destruction that annihilates its object, even if its strength is its relationship with supercritical philosophy exemplified by Nietzsche. It is not an analysis or criticism, even if it is analytical or critical in nature. The deconstruction is interested in neither suppression nor conservation, but in the logic of play. The deconstruction questions the illusion of unity and purity of meaning."[8]

"Deconstruction is not synonymous with destruction... The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of significations within the text itself. If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not the text, but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another."[9]

"The deconstruction, rather, annihilates the ground on which the building stands by showing that the text has already annihilated the ground, knowingly or unknowingly. Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of the text but the demonstration that it has already dismantled itself."[10]

'For Derrida, deconstruction is not a method; it is the exhibition of a vocation for rewriting. It aims to combat the strategy of prioritizing. Derrida questions the validity of a radical distinction between the "indicating" and the "expressed". He shows that the perception does not exist, what we call as perception is only the "re-presentation."[11]

8    Christian Godin, *Dictionnaire de Philosophie*, Fayard, Paris, 2004, p. 299.

9    Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference*, 1980, p. 5.

10    J. Miller, *Theory then and now*, 1991, p. 26.

11    Jean Greisch, Deconstruction et/ou hermeneutique, in : Pierre Gisel & Patrick Evard (eds.), *La theologie en postmodernite*, Labor et Fides, Geneve, 1996, pp. 356-368.

Even Derrida did not like defining deconstruction. In the *Letter to a Japanese Friend* he wrote: 'This is not an analysis. This is not a criticism, in a general sense or in a Kantian sense. I would say the same for the method. Deconstruction is not an act or transaction because then it would be something passive and would not become a subject capable of analyzing a text or a theme. Deconstruction takes place; that does not wait for the deliberation, the consciousness or the organization of the subject. It simply deconstructs.'[12]

As mentioned above, even the reader is not the producer of the deconstructive process;it is *something that simply happens* in a critical reading. Each text deconstructs itself by undermining its own supposed grounds and dispersing itself into incoherent meanings. Derrida levels the criticism, 'deconstruction is destruction,' saying that this procedure only situates a text in a system of difference which shows the instability of the effects to which the text owes its seeming intelligibility.[13]

So far, we have been trying to expose one dominant trait of the postmodern culture namely Derrida's concept of deconstruction. Now our task is theological. We have to examine whether this postmodern trait can be understood in the light of Jesus and his teachings, an irreversible step in any project of theologizing.

## 2. Deconstructive Ways of Jesus

James K. A. Smith said: 'Church does not need Jacques Derrida in order to be deconstructed, because it has got Jesus. The deconstruction of the Church happens from inside.'[14] Anyone who is aware of the liberative thrust of gospel will have no difficulty to agree with Smith's argument. The Word of God,by its very nature,is auto-corrective and hence if we let the Word do its critical function that will shape the Church accordingly. Contextual reading of the Gospels – in fact every reading

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[12] Jacques Derrida, *Lettre à un ami japonais, Psyché, Invention de l'autre*, Galilée, Paris, 1987, pp. 390-391.

[13] M.H. Abrams & Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Handbook of Literary Terms*, CENGAGE Learning, India Edition, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 69-70.

[14] James K. Smith, 'Introduction,' in: *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, John D. Caputo, Baker Academic, Michigan, 2007, p. 16.

is, and can only be so, a contextual reading - necessitates decoupling the meaning given to a word, a symbol or event by the vested groups and discovering the meanings relevant for the present. In the Gospels we find that Jesus resisted domestication of the word of God by the Pharisees and the priests of his time. He renewed the meaning of several presuppositions of his epoch regarding God, Sabbath, man, law, love, identity, power, etc. We will consider a few of them here.

### 2.1. God

The word 'God' aroused in the people of Israel a feeling of transcendence. Yahweh was the Maker and Lord of heaven and earth, one, almighty, eternal, immense and unspeakably exalted. The official interpreters of Torah portrayed Him mostly as a strict and punishing God, perhaps to make them submissive to the Law. This had a negative impact on the Jews. The God of exodus became distant and unfamiliar to them. They could not experience the liberating presence of Yahweh. Righteousness with God was made identical with ritual purity. The purity coincided with distinctness. Consequently the relation among the Israelites too became much rigid. The rich, the mighty and the learned became the 'pure' and the poor, the sick and the illiterate 'impure'. The former disregarded the latter.Jesus was born into such a religious ambient.

Jesus did not speak about a metaphysical God. His experience of God was the Abba-experience. He was not like a devotee stretching hands towards the Lord for mercy. Jesus had wondrous closeness with God. He spoke of father with casualness of a child:"All things are delivered unto me of my Father and I am in the Father, and the Father is in me" (Mt 11, 27). When disciples asked him to show them Father, he said: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14, 9). His prayer for the unity of the world (Jn 17)expresses his familiarity and emotional bond with the Father. He died in harmony with the Father. "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk23, 46). Jesus' intimacy with the Father included the awareness of God's otherness also. God's others are the *others* on earth. The Abba-experience directed him towards the publicans and sinners (Mk 2, 14-17). The weak and the small attracted

his special attention because the heavenly Father does not want anyone to be lost (Mk 10, 13-16). Jesus broke through the xenophobia of the Jewish community. He dared infringement of the sacred order of Sabbath in order to transmit the liberating love of God the Father. Thus Jesus' experience of the Father becamethe foundation of Christian agape.[15]

## 2.2. Power

John D. Caputo looks closely at how Jesus deconstructs the Jewish concept of the authority and reinterprets it from the perspective of the Kingdom[16]. Jesus was not a super hero or mythological power who crushed his enemies with might. Instead, he was the symbol of the defeated, executed and abandoned. He became an instrument of public execution like a gallows. When he was arrested, he corrected the disciple who brandished a sword from its sheath to defend him, saying that this is not how things are done in the kingdom of God (Mt 26, 52). Also on the cross, Jesus was not an icon of power, but a sign of powerlessness. Saint Paul called this,"the weakness of God" in 1 Cor 1: 25. What rises up from the cross is not a show of might but practice of non-violence, non-resistance, forgiveness, mercy, compassion and generosity.

As part of deconstructing the concept of power Jesus vehemently turned against the Jewish authorities of the time. Those who oppressed the defenseless people under the cover of God's authority became matter of his constant criticism. He reserved a special anger for the religious hypocrites. He considered everything that went against the love of God and love of neighbour, however sacred it was in men's eyes, as manmade, conditional and deconstructible. When the woman caught in adultery was presented to him, his emphasis fell not on the adulterous woman but on the hypocrisy of her accusers. His speech against the religious authorities in Lk 20, 47 (who devour the house of widows) and in Mk 11, 17 (den of thieves) was very sharp.

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[15] Ad Willems, 'The Greatness of a Little Narrative', in: *Who is Afraid of postmodernism?*, Stephan van Erp& Andre Lascaris (eds.), Lit, Munster, 2005, pp. 73-77.

[16] John D. Caputo, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, pp. 81-88.

Whenever one would expect the divine power in Jesus shine, his contemporaries witnessed not the demonstration of force but the madness of his love. On the other hand, whenever he displayed his power it was not forhimself, but on behalf of others. He came to heal and release those who were in disarray. He endured all things in his own body but did not tolerate sufferings in the bodies of others. He was guided by the principle of showing excess of love and gift. He had an unmistakable madness for justice and love. His understanding of the power was opposed to that of the Jewish rabbis.

### 2.3. Identity

Another concept that Jesus deconstructed was identity. Reading the parable of Good Samaritan (Lk10, 25-37) from a postmodern perspective, Andre Lascaris shows how Jesus gave an alternative meaning to identity.[17] At the time of Jesus,the concepts of 'clean and unclean' determined who was and was not part of the Jewish community. The Priests and Levites in the parable were groups having certain status in the society. As guardians of the Temple and the Law their identities were built in relation to the sacredness.But the common people - poor, sinners, pagans, sick, women, children, etc. - who lived at the margins of society had no identity. The Good Samaritan was part of this category of 'non-people.'

But Jesus gave identity to the lowly ones by reversing the sense of purity. The victim in the story has been robbed and persecuted and liedon the street like an orphan, half dead and hence entirely absent. His body was like a poison that one should avoid. But Jesus turned it into a gift, a gift that gave Samaritan the identity of God's child. The Samaritan does not act as if he was directed by the great narrative of love. It was not a reasoned argument or missionary zeal that drove him to act. Jesus presents him as affected by the victim. In fact it was impossible for the Samaritan to help a Jew because his identity was different from that of Jews. But a feeling of oneness came between the Samaritan and the robbed. In the

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[17]    Andre Lascaris, Can I Say 'We'? in: *Who is Afraid of postmodernism?*, pp. 30-33.

care for the victimized the Samaritan emancipated from his own religious identity.

Jesus ends the story, observes Lascaris, without giving any abstract argument. In fact the story began with a lawyer searching for a general commandment: define for me who is the neighbour whom I have to love. To Jesus it appeared a wrong question. So he answered saying, 'do likewise.' He is inviting the lawyer to let the miracle of mercy happen also in his life. There is no definite neighbour fixed beforehand. Acts of mercy and love happen unexpectedly. What really happens is not the fulfillment of a command but the grace of God, which is a gift. Thus identity is not something that is predetermined according to the birth or profession but received as a gift from God while being in solidarity with the victimized.

## Conclusion: Challenge for the Church

On account of the negative impacts of postmodernity in the field of metaphysics, hermeneutics and social life there are people who perceive it as a reactionary movement. It is true that deconstructive reading decomposes the structures of every kind: philosophical, political, social or institutional. The thought of differance in its highest radicalism may preclude consensus and make the common platform of life implausible. In the hands of deconstructivists, the biblical passages may lose their transcendence and normative value.

At the same time, the analysis we made about Jesus' teachings in the light of deconstruction shows that it is not *ipso facto* negative. It can be a constructive social theory if we limit it to the level of removing the presumptions added to the text by the vested groups. Derrida expresses against the critic as follows: "I was quite explicit about the fact that nothing of what I have said had a destructive meaning. Deconstruction has nothing to do with destruction. It is simply a question of being alert to the implications, to the historical sedimentation in the language we use, and that is not destruction."[18]

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[18]    Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, John Hopkins University Publications, Maryland, 1997, p. 271.

A mature attitude towards postmodernity would be neither lamentation nor applause. It is the cultural construct of today's society of which we are part. Church, as the continuation of the community of disciples initiated by Jesus, needs to face the task of deconstruction. Church can profit from the process of deconstruction to build an authentic Christian community. Within the Gospel there is no reference to any authoritarian center because Jesus stands for the restoration of the discriminated and disadvantaged. In order that Church remains as a relevant cultural text for the people she has to diffuse authority among the marginalized groups. Then only she can be a webbing agent of love, deep down chained to salvation brought by Christ.[19]

Accept that the future is more indeterminate than we once believed. Be ready to take risks because life goes on. While some walls fall down others may be put up. Every solution to a problem creates another and often an unexpected one. That is the law of evolution. Postmodernity helps us to read our tradition and knowledge in an original way. The différance opens tremendous opportunity before us to translate the Christian message according to different situations. Take up these challenges, for we believe not in the God of the dead but of the living.

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[19]  S. Lourdunathan, Can we speak of a postmodern Christianity?,*Journal of Dharma*, 33, 4 (October-December 2008), pp. 384-385.

# Alternative Concerns in Doing Theology

## Mathew Illathuparampil

Positive developments in theology would mean not only the enrichment of theological conclusions but also the constant refinement of the methods of doing theology. Dr. Mathew Illathuparampil, professor of moral theology at St Joseph Pontifical Seminary, Aluva, Kerala, in this article proposes four alternative concerns which deserve greater attention while doing theology. They include the role of human experience in theology, contextuality of theology, the function of theology's prophetic imagination, and the reception of theology. These are not concerns absolutely unknown in theology. But they need to become inalienable part of theologization. In order to make theology more meaningful to the faithful and more conversant to the world, we cannot miss these alternative concerns in doing theology.

From a global perspective, contemporary theology is known for many strong points. For example, the changing profile of theological community has become more inclusive, moving away from its once exclusively male and clerical face. The process of theologization has found fertile ground in the university contexts apart from the narrow ecclesial context of the seminary curriculum. The scope of theology is becoming broader as it assumes increasingly a multidisciplinary approach. Apparently, no theme in human life remains foreign to the tastes of theology, be it global economics, cybernetics or ecology. Greater awareness about the scope of contextual theologies has made many feeble voices in theology heard in different ecclesiastical circles. As a whole, Catholic theology has never been as multifaceted in perspectives and rich in content, as it is today.

In spite of these luminous aspects, it looks that theology needs a shift of emphasis in its focal concerns. It is not to negate altogether the already existing concerns, rather to complement them with alternative concerns in the process of theologization. This paper tries to suggest a few areas where a shift of emphasis in doing theology is required. It does not however mean that the suggested shifts are totally absent in contemporary theology. Rather, it means to invite greater attention to them with certain justification. The suggested areas of greater attention include human experience, contextuality of theology, the role of prophetic imagination, and the reception of theology.

## I. Human Experience

Traditionally enumerated sources of theology rightly identify sacred scripture, tradition, human reason, magisterial teachings, etc. In addition to these, theologians have resorted to various philosophical currents of their time in the process of theologization. But human experience is not frequently considered a legitimate source of doing theology. Consequently, many people complain against classical and western theology that it tends to be abstract and divorced from the lived human situation. It could be one of the reasons why most theological works remain unintelligible to many people.

Experience is a rather complex process. It arises from the human capacity to encounter one's environment consciously, to observe it, even be affected by it, and to learn from it. This process involves various levels of attentiveness and receptivity; there can also be pre-reflective perceptions. It naturally necessitates continuous interpretation. Therefore, there is no experience devoid of the basis of interpretation. Interpreted experience is articulated through words. Hans-Georg Gadamer explains, "it is part of experience itself that it seeks and finds words that express it... the right word, i.e. the word that really belongs to the object, so that in it the object comes into language."[1]

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[1]    Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury, 1975) 401.

All human experience is "constructed" in the sense that they are socially and culturally conditioned. This paves way for further and diverging interpretations. The biological, psychological, cultural, ecological and social needs are common to all people in a way, therefore can be called universal. However, they are subject to different forms of specific construction and interpretation, as historical and cultural changes require or justify it. Such "constructed" interpretations of needs and expectations or human experience cannot be ignored in theology.[2]

One of the interesting developments in theology in the past few decades is the emphasis on human situation and experience as sources of theology. *Gaudium et Spes* represents the first conciliar document that made the experience of the people to whom it was addressed as its starting point. More importantly Vatican II wrote in the same document, "There are a number of particularly urgent needs characterizing the present age, needs which go to the roots of the human race. To a consideration of these in the light of the Gospel and of human experience, the Council would now direct the attention of all" (GS 46). The Council did not hesitate to place human experience along with the Gospel as an illuminative aid in interpreting issues of the times.

The lead of Vatican II has been successfully followed by various later theological attempts. For example, the so called Third World theologies give due weight to the experience of poverty, caste system, political anarchy and oppression as starting point and loci of theological reflection. What they visualize is to develop the praxis of liberation in the light of the Gospel message. Many Western theologians, including Edward Schillebeeckx and Hans Küng, have made it legitimate to count

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[2]    Donald L. Gelpi, *The Turn to Experience in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1994) 121-57. For other works on the contribution of "experience" to theology see, Margaret A. Farley, "The Role of Experience in Moral Discernment," in Lisa Sowle Cahill and James F. Childress, eds., *Christian Ethics: Problems & Prospects* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1996) 134-51; Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995) 47-94; George P. Schner, "The Appeal to Experience,"*Theological Studies* 53 (1992) 40-59.

human experience as one of the two poles of theology. The other one is naturally the Christian tradition of Revelation-Faith experience. Schillebeeckx held that there is a dimension of experience which exceeds all interpretative frameworks. At the same time, he reminds us that all human experiences are interpreted experience. He had in mind the universally shared human experience of suffering as a starting point of theology.[3] Bernard Lonergan's method of theology starts with experience.He places it in the broader context of the epistemology of experience. For example, he writes, "But as the many elementary objects are constructed into larger wholes, as the many operations are conjoined in a single compound knowing, so too the many levels of consciousness are just successive stages in the unfolding of the single thrust, the eros of the human spirit. To know the good, it must know the real; to know the real, it must know the true; to know the true, it must know the intelligible; to know the intelligible, it must attend to the data. So from slumber, we awake to attend."[4] Feminist, liberation and narrative theologians do reflect on their experience and stories of marginalization and oppression. It is in this context of taking experience seriously that social analysis in theology becomes legitimate.

## Theology's Openness to Human Experience

Why should theology be open to human situation and experience? More broadly formulated, why should theology analyze the social, historical, economic, political and cultural context of people?

Perhaps, the foremost reason why theology should be open to human situation and experience is to make theology meaningful and relevant. Theology interprets the Christian tradition for the contemporary situation.

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[3]    Edward Schillebeecx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus the Lord* (New York, NY.: Seabury, 1980) 62., for more on this theme see, FrederiekDepoortere, Stephan Van Erp, LievenBoeve, *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology*(London: Clark, 2009) 128. There are other theologians such as John Henry Newman, Maurice Blondel and Karl Rahner who have given due weight to human experience in theologizing.

[4]    As cited in R. Jeffrey Grace,"The Transcendental Method of Bernard Lonergan,"http:// lonergan. concordia.ca/ reprints/grace-method.htm (accessed on 01-11-2011).

Thus, for theology to be meaningful and relevant, it must be open to the lived-experience and situation of the people. In order to interpret and explain the truths of our faith, we must take into account the context and experience of faith-community or the church. One can even claim that the basic condition for all interpretation of faith is the meaningfulness of the interpretation. An interpretation would become meaningful when it reflects real experience. Divested of the questions, quests and concerns of people in a specific socio-cultural context, it is difficult for a theology to become meaningful. There are many historical examples to illustrate that all theological truth and knowledge do not come from above, from ahistorical abstractions. Examples from the second millennium illustrating this claim would include the introduction of Aristotle into theology in 12th and 13th centuries, the rise of historical approach to biblical studies in the 17th century, review of the morality of taking interest in the 18th century, etc.[5] Once stripped of their particular socio-historical context, all these events would become meaningless.

The response of Christian faith to questions that emerge in a particular socio-cultural, political-economic context will determine the nature of theology. It is quite natural that the emphasis and priority of theology will depend on the given context. The kind of theology that develops in an industrialized, affluent society would be different from the theology that emerges from a poverty-stricken, oppressed society. For, both these contexts have different material and spiritual needs. Each context seeks to know what the Christian revelation-faith has to say to make our life meaningful, be it in the context of affluence or poverty. The discourse about God, Christ, the Church, salvation, etc. would become meaningless, unless they converse to the experience of people.

Human situation and experience cannot be ignored in theology, because, God is truly present in our life. There is continuous encounter with God that takes place in history, in the lives of individuals and communities. What the Sacred Scriptures represents is the written account

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5   GhislainLafont, *Imagining the Catholic Church: Structured Communion in the Spirit* (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 2000) 45.

of God's action in history. Individual or collective human experience has to be discerned and interpreted in the light of the Scriptures. Theology would demand us to reflect on the implications of a truly immanent God in our lives. Each and every human experience asks what God says to the involved people in such a situation. Theology cannot be silent to pressing human situations, as it tries to verbalize the mind of God in authentic ways as far as possible. But if we conceive theology simply as a discourse on God in abstract terms, using arid philosophical categories,reference to human experience would become superfluous.

In feminist theologies and theologies done by women human experience assumes focal attention. Pamela Dickey Young explores the various dimensions of the meaning of experience as far as women are concerned. Thus experience has at least five facets: "women's bodily experience, women's socialized experience (what culture teaches us about being women), women's feminist experience (response to women's socialized experience), women's historical experience, and women's individual experiences."[6] To blend meaningfully different forms of experience that women face today becomes a hard job for women. Consider the poignant words of Nancy Mairs: "I just keep inscribing the fathers' words with my woman's fingers and hope that the feminine will bleed through."[7]

Human experience is very seriously taken in feminist theological constructions. Feminists take it as a bridge leading to the experience of God. For instance, Elizabeth Johnson writes that "women's awakening to their own human worth can be interpreted at the same time as a new experience of God."[8] It is interesting to note that even the apparently highly speculativedoctrine of the Trinity is interpreted in terms of women's experience.Her contention is that women's experience can offer us some hints that would convince us of God as Trinity. She speaks

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[6]    P. D. Young, *Feminist Theology/Christian Theology: In Search of Method* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 53.

[7]    N. Mairs, Voice Lessons: On Becoming a (Woman) Writer (Boston: Beacon, 1994) 49.

[8]    Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*(NewYork: Crossroad, 1992) 62.

about the Biblical figure of divine *Sophia* as, in turn, Spirit, Jesus, and Mother (instead of Father, satisfying the feminist stints). Instead of beginning with the unity of God or the first Person of the Trinity, she begins with Spirit. She believes that this approach "allows a starting point more closely allied to the human experience of salvation, without which there would be no speech about the triune God at all."[9] We do not explore this attempt further; but just suggest here that human experience of being engaged in relationships is constructively used to explain the dogma of Trinity.

The role of experience looms large in moral theological reflections. It may not be sound to attribute any claims of authority to experience alone. For, objective norms are important. But collective human experience may at times assume objective stance. The demands of moral norms can be fully appreciated in reference to particular experience of men and women. Kenneth Melchin argues that "the moral judgement pertains not to a hypothetical situation but to the concrete reality occurring now. It is this concrete intelligibility which can only be known by the subject on the spot, even if this knowledge of the concrete is achieved by the subject grasping this experience as an instance of a class which has been understood and evaluated adequately by the authorities. The moral judgement pertains to the single, total, unified intelligibility which constitutes the moral nature of the concrete experience."[10]

However, it must be cautioned that recourse to experience in theology is not without its difficulties. One element of anxiety could be that reference to experience may easily lead one to relativism. Similarly it is not easy to interpret experience. For various factors such as prejudice, bias or partial factual knowledge, etc., can distort them. In different cultures and in a pluralistic worldview human experience lends itself to mutually contrasting readings.

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[9]   Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is,* 122.

[10]  Kenneth Melchin, "Revisionists, Deontologists and the Structure of Moral Understanding,"*Theological Studies* 51 (1990) 404.

Having mentioned also the inherent limitations of the use of experience in theology, we may make the modest conclusion that in order to make theology meaningful in India, it must refer to the experience of people during the process of theologization. Introductory and passing reference to poverty, oppression, caste system, bribery in the public square, etc., would not sufficiently do justice to the need for attention to human experience in theology. Experience must become one of the tools of doing theology, especially in interpreting the gospels, faith-traditions and teachings of the church.

## II. Contextuality of Theology

Giving due weight to human experience in theology will naturally lead us to respect different contexts while doing theology. For collective human experience is represented by socio-political and cultural contexts. In fact, the recognition of contextual theologies initially meant that they are subsystem within a larger system of theology or application of pure theology into particular contexts. Thus Asian, African, Latino, liberation, feminist theologies were called contextual theology. And European theology stood for centuries, as if not contextual.But of late we have come to a general consensus that all theological discourse is essentially contextual. That means, there has never been any non-contextual theology. But certain assumptions of cultural superiority of Europe which were also operative in the process of theologization masked the contextual nature of European theology.

It has now become almost well accepted that all theology is necessarily contextual. A significant contribution to this debate has been made by American theologian Stephan Bevans.He insists that "in reality, there is no 'theology' as such - no 'universal theology' - there are only contextual theologies."[11] In his *Models of Contextual Theology*, originally published in 1992, he argues:

"There is no such thing as "theology"; there is only *contextual* theology: *feminist* theology, *black* theology, *liberation* theology, *Filipino*

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[11]    Stephen Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009) 4.

theology, *Asian-American* theology, *African* theology, and so forth. Doing theology contextually is not an option, nor is it something that should only interest people from the Third World, missionaries who work there, or ethnic communities within dominant cultures. The contextualization of theology - the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context - is really a theological imperative. As we have come to understand theology today, it is a process that is part of the very nature of theology itself."[12]

The essential contextuality of theology is nothing new; but awareness about it is new. To take an ancient example, the development of the doctrine of *homoousios* at the Council of Nicaea illustrates the Church's willingness to transcend the Biblical categories in order to communicate a biblical message in a Greek-influenced culture.

The contextuality of theology would naturally acknowledge the role of theologians involved with the life of local communities. It is this aspect that gives theology a unique pastoral edge. Despite this near universal consensus on the contextual nature of theology, there still remains the need as to how this theological contextuality should be understood. It may require us to re-contextualize eternal truths. We will have to reinterpret the propositional models of the truths of revelation in favor of contextual encounter or relationship. Often times in this process, we will have to ask the question of which God are we talking: at the minimum, God of philosophers or God of our forefathers?

## III. Prophetic Imagination of Theology

What could be the prime purpose of doing theology in the contemporary world? Many ends could be suggested. However, theology has to become increasingly a God-talk. It is to speak for God—just as the prophets did. In this sense, theology has to extend its prophetic imagination to various dimensions of human life.

The primary work of theology nowadays is to interpret the Word of God to help the community to overcome the denial of God and the

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[12]   Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 3.

consequent despair. "The prophetic character of theology consists in its service to the ongoing dialogue between God and God's people."[13] Theology's prophetic function has to be seen in the context of the prophetic role of the whole ecclesial community. That is to say, prophetic imagination of theology need not be restricted only to professional theologians. Yves Congar illustrates that the whole people of God enjoy the knowledge of God and the power of discernment. For, the prophetic oracles of the OT well accepted in the NT (Jer 31: 31-34 cf. Heb 8: 8-12; Isa. 54: 13 cf. Jn 6: 45, etc.) reveal that.[14]

How will theology serve the faith-community and the world at large? In contemporary world, it could be by fighting against growing despair, be it caused by mounting economic recession or personal reasons. It is the prophetic role of theology to instill the saving power and presence of God in the minds of people. "If pride is the temptation in the monarchic period, despair is the primary seduction in exile... The negative counterpoint to the exaggerated claims of the empire, inevitably, is loss of confidence in Yahweh, wonderment whether Yahweh has lost power (Cf. Isa. 50: 2; 59: 1), speculation that Yahweh is fickle and has forgotten (Isa. 49: 14). Despair in Israel is the growing sense that there is no reliable Yahweh to whom to appeal, and therefore one must be governed by circumstances and accommodate oneself to the managers of circumstances."[15]

Prophetic call of theology concerns the entire church. It involves a process of study and assimilation of divine truths from wherever possible. "The whole people of God is called to learn and receive from the world, recognizing the transforming presence and activity of God's spirit in other social movements, cultural and religious traditions, and in the wisdom of secular knowledge. Vatican II, in *Gaudium et spes*, exhorts

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[13]   Catherine E. Clifford & Richard R. Gillardetz, "Re-Imagining the Ecclesial/ Prophetic Vocation of the Theologian,"*Louvain Studies*  34 (2009-2010) 345.

[14]   Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of the Laity* (London: Bloomsbury, 1957).

[15]   Walter Brueggemann, "Prophet as Mediator,"*Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*  (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) 626.

"the people of God as a whole... and especially pastors and theologians, to listen to the various voices of our day, discerning them and interpreting them, and to evaluate them in the light of the word, so that the revealed truth can be increasingly appropriated, better understood and more suitably expressed" (no. 44, cf. *GS* 62)."[16]

The scope of the prophetic imagination will naturally extend also to the formally accepted and taught theology. The lived faith of the church precedes doctrinal formulations. Prophetic teaching office of the church cannot be reduced to teaching of doctrine. "Doctrinal teaching is but a partial expression of the faith of the church and is completed by the living faith of the whole community. The multiple witness of the church on earth, expressed diversely in the authoritative teaching of the magisterium, in the reflections of theologians, and in the teaching and witness of all baptized coalesce into a symphony."[17] Fundamental reason for this assertion is that, as Congar affirms, "truth is revealed in the living communion of the whole church."[18]

The diversity of theological voices is not a threat to the unity of the church's teaching. What we require is theological community's commitment to communion in faith which is lived across different church communities. The claims for absolute certitude and rightness in theology, be it from the teaching office of the church or from the works of theologians, must be confronted with different voices. Readiness to be subjected to various theological voices in the church is an expression of eschatological humility, revealing the awareness that the whole truth will be unveiled only at the end of times. If Christians can become members of the faith community in a continuum of varying degrees of incorporation in the faith community, as very well suggested by *Lumen Gentium* 15, Christians can share in theological truths in varying degrees of perfection.

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[16] Catherine E. Clifford & Richard R. Gillardetz, "Re-Imagining the Ecclesial/Prophetic Vocation of the Theologian," 350.

[17] Catherine E. Clifford & Richard R. Gillardetz, "Re-Imagining the Ecclesial/Prophetic Vocation of the Theologian," 349.

[18] Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church*,384.

## IV. Reception of Theologies

The way in which theologies are received and assimilated by church communities could be taken as an indication of the strength of that theology. This proposition is to be clarified in the historical context and meaning of the expression of the reception of (doctrinal) teachings of the church. It has got a rather complex history which we do not explore here.[19] However, reception of theology remains a focal point in the entire process of theologization.

In the Catholic tradition, we do not find much discussion on the reception of theologies; rather the focus was on the reception of doctrines or teachings of the church. From the time of the Council of Trent until the 1950s, theological reflection restricted itself to the question how the apostolic faith has been 'handed on,' focused on the teaching of the bishops. Only in the second half of the twentieth century there arose the awareness that the teaching process of doctrine cannot be understood apart from the ecclesial process of *receptio* - the work of the whole Church in the reception of what has been taught.[20] In the years immediately after Vatican II, theologians dealt with the role of reception in the life of the Church.[21]

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[19] Edward J. Kilmartin, "Reception in History: An Ecclesiological Phnomenon and its Significance," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21 (1984) 37.

[20] Richard R. Gaillardetz,"The Reception of Doctrine: New Perspectives, "*Bernard Hoose*ed., *Authority in the Roman Catholic Church* (London: Ashgate, 2002) 95-114.

[21] For a variety of writings on this theme see, A. Grillmeier, 'Konzil und Rezeption: Methodische Bemerkungenzueinem Thema der okumenischen Diskussion der Gegenwart' *Theologie und Philosophie* 45,(1970)321-52.Y.Congar, 'La 'reception'commerealiteecclesiologique, ' in *Egliseetpapaute: Regards historiques,* Paris: Cerf, 1994, 229-2 66. For an abbreviated English translation of this work see,G. Alberigo, A. Weiler, (eds), "Reception as an Ecclesiological Reality," in *Election and Consensus in the Church, Concilium* 77 New York: Herder, 1972, pp. 43-68. For other notable studies on the topic see, J-M.R.Tillard, 'Tradition, Reception', in *The Quadrilog, Tradition and the Future of Ecumenism,* Festschrift for George Tavard, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994, pp. 328-43; idem, 'Reception - Communion', *One in Christ ,* 28 (1992) 307-22; H.J. Pottmeyer, "Reception and Submission,"*The Jurist* 51 (1991) 269-92; T. Rausch,"Reception Past and Present, *"Theological Studies,* 47 (1986) 497-508.

Initially, reception referred to the process by which a teaching, ritual, discipline or law was assimilated into the life of a local church. Alois Grillmeier was one of the first theologians to develop the notion of ecclesial reception. He was influenced by certain theories of legal reception, according to which a legal tradition from one group of peoples is 'received' or taken over by another group. According to this understanding, reception of something happens within a community which comes to it from another community. Grillmeier extended it to the ecclesial process by which the ancient Churches accepted synodal decrees from other Churches as binding for themselves.[22]

Yves Congar pointed out that Grillmeier understood 'reception' in a restricted sense by insisting on its exogenous character. Congar held that the distance among local churches is narrow. That which is received by one local church from another can never be totally foreign. Congar presented a much broader idea of reception. For him, reception denoted a constitutive process in the Church's self-realization in history. He linked reception with that ancient reality which he refers to as 'conciliarity.' For Congar, conciliarity describes not just an ecclesiastical/ecumenical event–council—but the fundamental reality of the Church as a communion of persons but realized by the Spirit. Councils are formal expressions of the reality of the Church itself: "...reception is no more than the extension or prolongation of the conciliar process: it is associated with the same essential "conciliarity" of the Church."[23] Congar describes "reception" as "the process by means of which a church (body) truly takes over as its own a resolution that it did not originate in regard to its self [sic], and acknowledges the measure it promulgates as a rule applicable to its own life."[24]

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[22]   Alois Grillmeier, "Konzil und Rezeption," 324.

[23]   Yves Congar, "Reception as an Ecclesiological Reality," 64. See also, Congar, Y., 'The Council as an Assembly and the Church as Essentially Conciliar', in H. Vorgrimler (ed.), *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. Studies on the Nature and Role of the Church in the Modern World* (London:Sheed& Ward, 1968) 44-88.

[24]   Yves Congar, "Reception as an Ecclesiological Reality," in GiuseppiAlberigo and Anton Weiler (eds.), *Election and Consensus in the Church*, Concilium 77 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 45.

From a historical point of view, ecclesial reception in the early Church meant the way in which local churches received or at times did not receive the authoritative pronouncements of synods and councils. It could be applied even to the process of reception at work in the gradual acceptance of those texts which became the canonical scriptures of the Church. An example of liturgical reception could be the Western Churches receiving the Eastern liturgical tradition of the *epiklesis* into their liturgy. Congar refers to the replacement of the "Gallican" rites in France in the nineteenth century by the Roman liturgy as a legitimate instance of reception.But he also believes that the substitution of the Roman liturgy for the Mozarabic liturgy in Spain by Pope Gregory VII does not provide an instance of genuine "reception".

This ancient process of ecclesial reception was weakened considerably in the second millennium. When the Church moved away from an ecclesiology of communion towards a more pyramidal view of the Church, the role of the hierarchy as the exclusive teachers of the Church emerged and the scope for the broader processes of ecclesial reception diminished. It became quite natural that during the late Middle Ages, theological understanding of reception as the Church's active appropriation of an articulation of its faith was replaced by a view of reception governed by the juridical notion of obedience. Wolfgang Beinert points out that reception, by the end of the Middle Ages, "became identical with the act through which the precept of the highest ecclesial authority as well as his subordinates was received and carried out in will and action."[25]

Vatican II in its turn did not develop a theology of ecclesial reception. If we read into the choice of words that the Council makes: the Latin verb *recipere* appears 35 times in the conciliar documents. But remarkably the Latin verb *accipere*, appears some 90 times in the

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[25]    Beinert, Wolfgang, The Subjects of Ecclesial Reception', *The Jurist*, 57, 1997, pp. 329-30. See also Pottmeyer, H., 'Reception and Submission', *The Jurist*, 51 (1991) 269-292.

documents.[26] This choice of words suggests that a more obedient approach to reception resides in the Council's ecclesiological vision. However, the larger ecclesiological developments of the Council were more open to the process of ecclesial reception. Naturally theologians such as Grillmeier,Congar, J-M.R. Tillard, Wolfgang Beinert, Herve Legrand, Angel Anton and Hermann Pottmeyer could subsequently develop the notion of ecclesial reception.

It is interesting to note that Congar affirms the importance of reception operative at Vatican II in the following words:

"That the concept of reception is still valid was shown adequately by Vatican II in its envisaging a collegial initiative emanating from the bishops, which could be a 'verus actus collegialis' only if the pope approved it 'vellibere recipiat.' . . . This text speaks of the reception of the privilege of the bishop of Rome that Vatican II so firmly reaffirmed and to which history bears adequate witness. It constitutes an authentic statement regarding reception since it is a matter of consent (by means of judgment) by one church body to a resolution put forward by others. Apart from this, law as at present knows no case of reception (so far as I am aware) other than acceptance by the pope, and, after him, by the world episcopate, of new bishops of the Eastern rite elected to their patriarchate after a mere 'nihil obstat' from Rome, but neither named nor confirmed by the Holy."[27]

## What does reception imply?

When Congar and others spoke about reception they had in mind mostly the reception of conciliar teachings. But it seems that the implications of reception can be extended to the authentic conclusions of theology in general. A theology which is closer to the message of the Gospel needs reception by all means. For reception of the Gospel is what makes the church. In the words of Joseph Komonchak:

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[26]   Gilles Routhier, "Reception in the Current Theological Debate,"*Jurist* 57 (1997) 31.

[27]   Yves Congar, "Reception as an Ecclesiological Reality," 45.

"The apostolic Gospel comes with the power of the Spirit and is received by faith, and where this event of communication takes place, the Church is born again. Where this event does not take place, where the Gospel is preached in vain, no Church arises. Where the Gospel ceases to be believed, the Church ceases to exist. The whole ontology of the Church - the real 'objective' existence of the Church - consists in the reception by faith of the Gospel. Reception is constitutive of the Church."[28]

Genuine ecclesial reception of a theology would naturally lead to ecclesial transformation of various sorts. Reception changes the receiving church and the received theology or message. "The apostolic Gospel comes with the power of the Spirit and is received by faith, and where this event of communication takes place, the church is born again. Where this event does not take place, where the Gospel is preached in vain, no church arises. Where the Gospel ceases to be believed, the Church ceases to exist. The whole ontology of the church—the real "objective" existence of the church—consists in the reception by faith of the Gospel. Reception is constitutive of the church."[29]

The fact of (non)reception could be an indication for the authenticity of a theological position. If a theological position did not find favor among well-meaning and genuine faithful for a long period of time, its veracity could be suspected. Reception may not be the only criterion for examining the strength of a theological position. However, it cannot be ignored, either.

### Conclusion

Theology at least at times requires genuine introspection. This paper is a modest attempt to suggest four areas where current theology needs

[28]    Joseph Komonchak, "The Epistemology of Reception,"*The Jurist* 57 (1997)193.,as quoted in Catherine E. Clifford & Richard R. Gillardetz, "Re-Imagining the Ecclesial/Prophetic Vocation of the Theologian," 353.

[29]    Joseph Komonchak, "The Epistemology of Reception,"*The Jurist* 57 (1997) 193

alternative emphases. The proposed ones are not non-existent emphases; but they have not become part of the dominant way of theologization. As we have already suggested, attention to aspects such as human experience, contextuality of theology, the role of prophetic imagination, and the reception of theology will have serious implication for the process of doing theology and the nature of the reception of theological conclusions. As a whole, respect to these elements, it is hoped that, would make theology more respectable and bring theology to the heart of the faithful as the interpretation of the faith that they believe in (orthodoxy) and try to live (orthopraxis).

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# Alternative Patterns of Relationship between Man and Woman

## Shalini Mulackal

A paradigm of men-women relationship marked and marred by mutual oppression and exploitation will in no way stand the test of Gospel values. In most cases, men-women relationships, irrespective of national boundaries, do not live up to Christian standards due to patriarchal structures and ways of thinking. This fact is very obvious in the case of India. In this article Dr. Shalini Mulackal pbvm, Catholic feminist theologian and Professor of systematic theology atVidyajyoti Theological Seminary, New Delhi, offers an outline of alternative patterns of relationship between man and woman. Basing on the Bible, she suggests such a paradigm of relationship founded on the vales of difference, sameness, complementarity and union. She holds convincingly that superior-inferior division is the result of the Fall.

## 1. Present Contextual Reality

Relationship between woman and man exists in a variety of ways and it existed from the time of creation onwards. Women and men relate as wife and husband, daughter and father, mother and son, sister and brother, niece and uncle, mother-in-law and son-in-law, daughter-in-law and father-in-law and so on. Besides blood ties and marital relationships, there are other relationships that exist between men and women. They can be colleagues, business partners, neighbours, members of certain associations, parish community, etc. One may wonder what type of relationships exist and why such relationships in all these situations

mentioned above. Most of us are familiar with the oft quoted verse from the law of Manu which says that a woman must never be independent. As a child she should be dependent on her father, later on her husband and in old age on her son. According to Christianity, man and woman are created in the image of God and so share equal dignity and worth. As members of the mystical body of Christ they are called to non-discriminatory and non-hierarchical ways of relating to one another. But what is the ground reality? How do men and women relate to one another in their daily lives? I would like to recall a few instances where I have witnessed how men and women relate to one another in different parts of our country.

Ancy and Mathew are married for the past eighteen years. After spending a night with this couple who are related to me, I get ready to leave and come out of the house in the morning. Mathew too comes out dressed up as though he is going out somewhere. Seeing Mathew dressed up, Ancy asks him where he is going. Instead of giving her a direct and simple answer, Mathew begins to give her a long lecture. "Why should you know where I am going? Is it your business to know where I go and what I do? If you want to know every move of mine then tomorrow onwards, I shall get a diary and write down everything and you can read it at your leisure…."

Chitramma and Muniyappa are an elderly couple who live in a village near Chennai. Their children are not staying with them as they have migrated to the nearby city in search of work. One evening as I was visiting a house I met Chitramma on the way. Both of us started to talk. After a few minutes, I heard loud shouting and I asked who was shouting and at whom. Then pointing towards her house I could see her husband standing outside and he was calling Chitramma. As I paid attention to what he was saying I was shocked. He was calling his elderly wife all kinds of names including dog, prostitute and so on… Apparently he was angry with her for not finding her around for a little while. Seeing my shocked face, Chitramma told me not to worry. She said that ever since she got married to him, he always showered verbal abuses at her

and as the years passed by she was accustomed to such a demeaning treatment.

In one of my visits, I was talking to Deepika who had been married to one of the sons in a Gujarati household situated in a resettlement colony in Delhi. As we were talking, the father-in-law of Deepika suddenly entered the room. Immediately Deepika fell silent, pulled her dupatta over her head and covered her face. Then as long as he remained, Deepika could only whisper in my ears whatever I was asking her.

I have come across other instances where daughters are frightened to approach their fathers; wives are not given permission to visit their parents even at the time of sickness, and parish priests ordering religious sisters working in the parish as though they are slaves working under him.

In another instance I came across a particular Dalit woman. During my interview with her I put this question to her. "Does your husband beat you?" In reply she said, "Yes, sister, but I too beat him once in a while! He should know how painful it is." There are also instances where women manipulate and control their husbands and children totally.

I have also witnessed husband and wife relating with respect, love and understanding; priests and sisters working in collaboration and men and women relating as good friends and colleagues. But such relationships of equality and mutuality are not so widespread. On the contrary, relationship of domination-subjugation seems to be the predominant mode which men and women choose in order to relate to one another in most of the times. At this juncture it is important to inquire why we prefer this mode of relationship especially in man-woman relationships.

## 2. An Analytical Inquiry

Feminists trace the root of domination-subordination relationship to patriarchy.[1] Many women find patriarchy as an important analytical tool for understanding the situation of women. For instance, Elizabeth

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[1]   It is an all –pervasive set of attitudes that have dominated human beings for thousands of years. According to patriarchy, the male of the human species is

Schüssler Fiorenza defines patriarchy as "a pyramidal system and hierarchical structure of society and church." God as the supreme good is at the top of existence and in a descending order are the angels, men, women, children, animals, plants, the earth, evil and chaos. It is an organization of society which is based on a false relationship, i.e., on domination. This system hampers the development of all people, especially women, persons who are weak, who are of a different race, and it destructively affects the world of nature. It stands on several connected pillars; racism, sexism, classism, militarism, and ecological destruction.[2]

Patriarchy seems to be at the root of gender discrimination and subordination of women in India. In spite of the progress our country has made in many areas including higher rate in literacy and education, Indian society continues to be under the grip of patriarchy to a great extent. The culture of patriarchy consists of all those ideas, norms, traditions, beliefs and values that uphold men and downgrade women. Women are still considered to be biologically, intellectually and spiritually inferior to men in spite of the fact that a considerable number of women today have entered the public domain.[3] The ideas and beliefs about women's inferiority and men's superiority are transmitted from one generation to the next, from one cultural group to another through language, gestures and postures and audio visual images and symbols. Further, in a patriarchal social order all social structures or institutions are based on non-participation or peripheral participation of women in decisions and governance in the family and society which includes the

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the norm of humanity; the female is secondary, created for his service. It has institutionalized patterns of power to control and exclude those it wishes to keep subservient. Here relationships are hierarchical, authority is imposed, and conflict is resolved by conquest. God is imaged as beyond, all –powerful, all-knowing, in charge, judging, controlling all things.

2   See Jana Opocenska, "Feminist Theology," Indian Journal of Theology, 37/2, (1995): 40-46 at 43.

3   There are four women chief ministers besides having a woman as the president of the ruling party. There are women serving as CEOs, top bureaucrats, ministers, professionals, etc.

public sphere of economy, polity, education, media, religion and civil society.[4]

Through the process of gendering or socialization, boys and girls are formed to manifest the characteristics assigned to them by society.[5] Men and women who are products or constructs of patriarchy in turn become the vehicles of patriarchy. Today's mass media, like television channels, newspapers, films and advertisements play a major role in transmitting stereotyped notions and beliefs about women's inferiority and men's superiority. Women and men internalize and their mutual relationships are very much influenced by such internalized values.

The deep seated character of gendering and gender relations is clearly brought out recently in a research study among the Catholic Syrian Christian women of Kerala.[6] Though apparently empowered by their higher educational and economic status, these women scored high on gender consciousness which is a contradiction. In response to statements assessing their notion of gender, the study found that 66.7% of women considered men as superior and 51.3% of them thought that men have the right to dominate them. While 72.1% of women felt that men deserve greater respect in their positions as 'head' of the family, 74.2% believed that it is in women's inborn nature to be self-sacrificing. Though women did not consider themselves intellectually inferior, 50.8% thought silence is a virtue for women. According to 72.1% women, the good woman is always obedient and 46.7% considered decision making is primarily man's prerogative.[7]

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[4]   See Rita Noronha, "Empowerment of Women in the Church and Society," 402-447.

[5]   Indian society has different socialization for girls and boys, making boys masculine and aggressive, while girls are socialised to become docile and self-sacrificing. Such socialising harms both the groups.

[6]   This study was undertaken by Kochurani for her doctoral research and the study was done in eight dioceses of the Syro-Malabar Church in Kerala, taking a stratified random sample of 240 women and 60 men using an interview schedule on a one-to-one basis, and on in-depth interviews. See Kochurani Abraham, "Engendering Gender Equality: The Challenge of 'Gender Policy,' "in *VJTR* 74/6 (June 2010): 460-474.

[7]   *Ibid.*, 465

In the same study it was found that men's response to notions of gender is equally revealing of the rootedness of gendering. 61.7% of the men interviewed considered themselves superior to women. 43.3% of them opined that they have the right to dominate women. 60% of men believed that women have to depend on them. 60% considered that the good woman is always obedient. In the opinion of 65% of men, it is in women's in-born nature to be self-sacrificing and to suffer patiently, and of 53.3%, cooking, cleaning and caring duties are primarily women's responsibility.[8]

Today the official church too admits the impact of patriarchy on our lives. For instance, the KCBC's[9] Gender Policy examines critically the culture of patriarchy, and identifies patriarchal values as the root of gender discrimination and the exclusion of women from decision making bodies even in the church:

> Through dominating social structures, right from the family onwards, men own, control and manage financial, intellectual and ideological resources as well as labour, fertility and sexuality of women, and thus perpetuate gender discrimination. Such a culture produces stereotyped notions of how a woman or man should behave (in thoughts, words and actions), whereby they themselves become transmitters of the above value system. Consequently, women become both victims and victimizers. The negative impact of these patriarchal values has, as a natural corollary, resulted in the inadequate participation of women in the church and societal life. As a result traditionally women used to be kept away from all decision-making processes and from the Church Bodies.[10]

In a patriarchal society, Religion is often used as a weapon to reinforce the subjugation of women. Though there were eminent female

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[8]   *Ibid.*

[9]   Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference

[10]  See the Gender Policy of KCBC (IV) as quoted by Kochurani "Engendering Gender Equality," 466.

scholars, poets and teachers[11]during the *Vedic* Age, the literate woman had become an anathema by the time of the lawgivers. For instance, Manu decreed that women had no right to study the Vedas. According to *Manusmriti* a woman must not be independent at any stage of her life. In the *Bhagavadgita* women are lumped together with sinners, slaves and outcasts. "They had come to be regarded as intrinsically evil, spiritually contaminate, poisoning by their very presence, and obstacles to salvation....Women, according to the texts, are the root of all evil and suffering. Behind even the most innocent exterior there is a raging passion of lust, since they are beings of insatiable sexual appetite."[12]

Islam strongly advocates *purdha* system. The Qur'an explicitly stresses the superiority of men over women. 'And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them' (2:228). And again, 'Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other...'(4:34). Men and women are not held to be socially equal by Islam. Down to the present time, for example, the evidence of two women is considered equivalent to that of one man in countries with Islamic law. Women are not socially independent in Islam, but legally need a man to act on their behalf. Woman's share of inherited property is less. Under Islamic law, she inherits half of what male members of the family receive.

The situation of women in Christianity too is not very different from other religious traditions. Feminist analysis points out that the Christian churches and theologies perpetuate women's inferiority through their institutional inequalities and theological justifications of women's innate differences from men.[13] Christian ethics impede the development

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[11]    Benjamin Walker, *Hindu World: Encyclopedic Survey of Hinduism*, vol.II, (New Delhi: MunshiramManoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1968): 603.

[12]    *Ibid.*: 604.

[13]    Georgia Masters Keightley in one of her articles examines contemporary feminist scholarship on issues in theological anthropology and explores traditional interpretations of woman's nature, the long standing tendency to justify woman's social inferiority on the grounds of her "natural" inferiority and the complete oversight of the area of woman's experience. See Georgia Masters Keightley, "The Challenges of Feminist Theology," *Horizons* 14/2 (1987): 262-282.

of self-assertion and autonomy by women by making them internalize certain 'feminine' passive attitudes like meekness, humility, submission, self-sacrifice, self-denying love etc.[14] Though Christian faith affirms that women are created in the image and likeness of God, redeemed in and through Jesus Christ, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, this is not actualized in women's ecclesial and societal life. On the contrary, women are forced to accept their inferior status. The Biblical and theological portrayal of women in a subordinate position reinforces the domination-subjugation relationship that exists between women and men.

It is often the language and metaphors used to express the mystery of God, which create certain attitudes among people. For example, the exclusive use of male imagery and masculine pronoun for God can create feelings of inferiority among women and superiority among men. So "we need new myths, new metaphors, new language if we are to calm the troubled waters of the relations between women and men," says Mercy Oduyoye.[15] As long as exclusive male imagery and language is used for God there will be difficulty in having gender relations of mutuality and equality among men and women.

Data from the field study mentioned above illustrates the impact of gendering through religious socialization. For instance, 77.1% of the women considered that their primary duty is to be a good mother by bringing up children in faith. When asked if God has given men the right to "rule over women," 52.9% answered affirmatively, and when checked if the statement "Wives be submissive to your husbands" reinforced at the Syrian Catholic engagement and marriage rituals is relevant, 78.3% agree with it.[16]

Whether we admit it or not, majority of women and men have internalized the patriarchal ideology and consequently their relationships are hierarchical in nature. In a hierarchical relationship one relates to

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[14]    See Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology as Critical Theology," in *Theological Studies*, 36/4 (December 1975): 608

[15]    Mercy Oduyoye. "A Biblical Perspective on the Church," *The Ecumenical Review* 53, 44-47.

[16]    Kochurani, "Engendering Gender Equality," 471.

the other from a position of power and superiority. This need not be confined only to man-woman relationship. It applies to all relationships among human persons. But in the case of man-woman relationship, it is often the man who is seen as superior and he relates to the woman from a position of power whether he is a husband, father, brother, priest or a colleague.

### 3. The Impact of Hierarchical Relationship on Woman and Man

Hierarchical relationship is one of the characteristics of patriarchy and it has an adverse impact on both women and men. First of all it eclipses the real identity and self-perception of the person. Assisted by the developments in modern psychology and related disciplines, there is an emphasis today on the need to have a healthy sense of self. It means the person has neither a sense of inferiority nor of superiority but s/he is aware of his/her strengths and limitations and accepts these as a matter of fact. Only a person who has a healthy sense of self, a realistic sense of who s/he is, can enter into healthy relationships with others.

Due to patriarchal socialization, women generally consider themselves as inferior to men. This feeling of inferiority makes them dependent beings, inhibits them from developing their God given gifts and talents and making use of these for building a better world. At a deeper level they are not able to appreciate themselves as persons created in God's image, loved unconditionally by God and therefore to lead a life of happiness and contentment. They become incapable of loving themselves and accepting themselves. On the other hand, men usually feed their ego with a superiority feeling and consider themselves as the only ones capable of managing this world and its affairs. Such inferiority and superiority complexes are blocks to become authentic human beings intended by God when God created us.

Moreover, the hierarchical relationship often fosters dependency and slavish behavior on the part of women. They become incapable of living a life of freedom, the greatest gift of God to humanity. It is the ability to make choices in life and thus grow as a person. Unlike earlier anthropology which considered human beings as readymade beings at

the time of birth, today's anthropology do not consider humans to be readymade. The choices we make in life are constitutive of our person hood. Salvation of the human person or the journey towards achieving wholeness is a journey of making free choices in life, informed by one's religious values and guided by one's faith experiences. Dominating relationships in families and in society at large inhibits women to become what God intends them to become as persons.

## 4. Biblical and Theological Foundations for Alternative Relationships

The theme of gender relations is a significant one in the biblical account of God's actions and intentions toward creation. Biblical revelation is very clear with regard to the type of relationships we need to cultivate between human beings in general and between men and women in particular. God's purpose for gender relations aims at mutuality and equality between women and men in marriage, the church, and society. Christian faith affirms that God created humankind as male and female in God's own image and likeness and entrusted to them the stewardship over all creation. God created men and women to be covenant partners- to image God together, to be co-stewards of creation's vast potential, and to share in the abundance of God's provision from the earth (Gen 1: 26-31). This is the protogospel of equal dignity of man and woman. It means both men and women are endowed with an inborn dignity and greatness. It affirms that men and women as human persons enjoy an intrinsic worth.[17]

Though created in God's image, the male and female were not the same. But whatever differences there were between the sexes were sources of delight and mutual help, a source of enrichment to each and to the covenant partnership. There is no mention of the man "ruling" the woman before the Fall; there are no rigid role-assignments along the lines of a gendered public/private split; there is no devaluation or competition in the relationship. Instead, the man delights in the woman

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[17]   See Editorial of *VJTR* 74/6 (2010): 1-4

as "the helper corresponding to him"[18] (Gen 2: 18) and together they begin the venture for which God created them. It is because of sin, the subordination of woman, the dominance of man, and the resulting perversion of their reproductive and stewardly responsibilities (Gen 3: 16-19) came to existence. Human history becomes in large part a story of the fallenness of gender relations. It is a story of rape, lust, deduction, adultery, fear, sexual competition, polygamy, dominance and submission.[19]

What does Jesus' life and teaching reveal about God's will for gender relations? We see that Jesus elevated the status of women and subverted the structure supporting male privilege and superiority. He not only thought of women as being equal in rank with men, as daughters of Abraham (Lk. 13:10-17) but openly ministered to them as 'children of wisdom' (Lk 7:35-50, Jn 4:1-42) who deserve respect (Mt 5:28). For example, in the Palestine of Jesus' day, women were not taught the Law. Rabbi Eliezer wrote, "Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman...Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her lasciviousness."[20] By contrast Jesus praised Mary of Bethany for listening to his teaching rather than following the typical woman's role of serving the meal (Lk 10: 38-41). He revealed himself as the Messiah to the doubly marginalized Samaritan woman (Jn 4: 5-26) and included women among his disciples (Lk 8: 1-3).

According to Jewish law at the time of Jesus, women were not permitted to be witnesses in legal proceedings. But the resurrected Jesus appeared first to women, whom he then commissioned to be his witnesses to others.[21] Jewish law allowed men to be polygamous, denied women

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[18] This translation is Phyllis Trible's. *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 92.

[19] See Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, Project Coordinator and Editor, *After Eden: Facing the Challenges of Gender Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans publishing Company, 1993), 7.

[20] Mishna, Sota 3, 4. Quoted by Leonard Swidler, *Yeshua: A Model for Moderns* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1988), 79

[21] See Jn 20: 11-18; Matt. 28: 9-10; Mark 16: 9-11.

the right to divorce, and permitted husbands to divorce their wives for even frivolous reasons. But Jesus' view on divorce was one important milestone in his mission to advocate gender equality. Jesus denounced the sole right of men to divorce their wives. His stand was to deny both husband and wife the right to divorce one another and thus he treated both husband and wife equally (Mk 10: 11-12; Matt. 19: 3-9). In Jesus' day, women's value and identity rested largely in their role as wives and mothers. But when a woman in a crowd cried out, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!" Jesus replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!" (Luke 11: 27-28).

Moreover, Jesus gave great importance to women, to the extent of going contrary to the usual Jewish traditions. He took note of the poor widow (Mk 12: 41-44), reached out in compassion to the widow who lost her only son (Lk 7: 11-17), allowed an 'impure woman' to touch him by brushing aside the Mosaic law that declared women impure during menstruation and child birth (Mt 9: 20-22), heard the plea of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7: 24-30), broke the Sabbath Law to heal the doubly bend woman (Lk 13: 10-17), befriended Mary Magdalene (Jn 20: 1-18) and felt compassion for the women of Jerusalem (Lk 23:27-32).

The early Christian Community was sustained by the deep faith of women who shared in the apostolic ministry. We find women extremely active in the missionary effort for sharing the Good News, as deacons, prophets, presiders, fellow workers, preachers and evangelists.Evodia and Syntyche were two prominent female members of the community at Philippe. They "struggled side by side" with Paul and shared his missionary work (Phil: 1: 5; 4: 2-3). Priscilla and Aquila are called Paul's co-workers. Along with this "couple missionary", Andronicus and Junia were described by Paul as "outstanding among the apostles" (Rom 16: 17). Junia was the only woman who had the privilege of being called an apostle in the Christian Testament. Phoebe was another Christian woman who shared responsibility with Paul as a teacher and missionary. Women participated in the work of evangelization and proclamation of the Gospel along with the men in true spirit of community of disciples and partnership of love.

## 5. Four Biblical Paradigms of Male-Female Relationships

The Biblical narrative and analysis of male-female relations is very complex. Yet it is possible to detect four different underlying paradigms which are used to describe the relationship between males and females. The first paradigm is *difference.* In the Genesis story of creation, as well as in many of the narratives about sin, the idea of difference is regularly emphasised. Eve is not the same as Adam. She is 'isha to his 'ish. Man and woman are different in terms of procreation. They also faced the first temptation differently: she gave in when she was alone; he, when he was in the company of his wife. They received different penalties as a result of the Fall: the woman in childbearing and the man in husbandry. To some extent we can say that the male and female followers of Jesus too had different roles. Paul suggests different dress codes for men and women at worship and he restrains women in some churches from exercising certain forms of leadership.

Yet difference does not exhaust the biblical perspective. The Bible also incorporates the idea of *sameness*, or similarity, when looking at the relationship between women and men.[22] In the second creation story, when the first man awoke from his sleep and saw the first woman, his cry was one of recognition of sameness: 'Here at last is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.' At one level the Bible does recognize an element of androgyny in male-female relations. They are both an equal part of the human race. Men and women are more like each other than they are like anything else in creation. So they are given the same command to be fruitful and multiply, to replenish the earth. They are given the same status over the rest of the creation, the same responsibility for procreation. Men and women are given the same moral requirements, the same mandate against idolatry, the same requirement for faithfulness to God. In their marital sexuality, they are to have the same freedoms and constrains. In the Church they have the same gifting from the Spirit as the Acts of the Apostles would testify. It is this sameness that Paul refers to when he mentions the baptismal equality of all believers (Gal 3:28).

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[22] See Elaine Storkey, *Created or Constructed? The Great Gender Debate*(U.K.: Paternoster press, 2000), 115.

The third biblical paradigm is *complementarity*. It is not that women and men are simply the same or different from each other; they are also complementary. That means they 'fit' together, They each reciprocate and fulfill something in the other. The first man was not complemented by any of the animals that he had named. They were fundamentally different from him. The woman complemented him. Paul refers to the interdependence of man and woman in 1 Cor. 11:11. But this complementarity does not imply hierarchy. It is premised on the reciprocation and completion of female by male and male by female.[23]

Finally the Bible also indicates the importance of *union*. Women and men are together as the image of God. The story of creation of man and woman stresses their 'ontological union' more than anything else. For the man was made as distinct from the animals, from the 'dust of the earth' as a separate creation. And out of the form of the first human, there were made two. Women and men are not ontologically different, with different spiritual identities, but are in union as humankind. This union is followed right through the Scripture. There is union of disobedience, a union of redemption. Both the author of Genesis and St. Paul offer us a picture of union of male and female in marriage where they are once again 'one flesh.' St. Paul tells us that husband and wife no longer have ownership of their own bodies. The husband has 'authority' over his wife's sexuality; the wife has 'authority' over her husband's. Metaphors of unity abound in the NT: as the Church, we are together the 'body' of Christ, and we are together the 'bride' of Christ. We are 'living stones' the 'royal priesthood' together. Our deepest experiences, both physical and spiritual, are not autonomy, difference or separateness, but of unity of male and female in God.[24]

If we focus only on one, say, difference or complementarity as Biblical perspective, then we distort the male-female relationship and inevitably end up with hierarchy and subordination. If we focus on another, for example, sameness, we again lose the full biblical picture, and reinforce androgyny and lose the significance of our differences.

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[23]  *Ibid*., 116.       [24]  *Ibid* ., 117.

But when we work with all the four, then we see the sweep of the biblical revelation and the space and scope it gives to us to develop our relationships faithfully and creatively.[25] The narratives of creation, sin and redemption offer us an alternative journey to that which our patriarchal culture has been making for centuries.

## 6. From Domination-Subordination to Relationships of Mutuality and Equality

The Christian understanding of man-woman relationship is clear. We are called to move away from dominating and subjugating type of relationship to relationships of mutuality and equality. But how do we make this shift when we know that many of us are operating from an internalized patriarchal value system? We need to follow a multi-pronged approach. We need to identify the causes and take steps to counteract the causes that perpetuate male superiority and female inferiority. One of the factors that create our attitudes is the language and imagery we use for God. It is my submission that as long as exclusive male imagery and language is used for God there will be difficulty in having gender relations of mutuality and equality among men and women. How do we overcome such a difficulty?

We know that the Bible uses a variety of imageries while speaking about God. God is pictured as Father, Mother, woman in labour, Husband, Shepherd, and King. God is also imaged as rock, mountain, fire, clouds, gentle breeze, eagle, mother hen, etc. But these are seldom used in our worship or theological articulations or in the artistic expressions. For instance, it is easy to find God portrayed as a Good shepherd or the Father who waits for the lost son but seldom is God portrayed as the woman who searches for the lost coin (Lk 15: 8-10) or the woman who took yeast and mixed it with three measures of flour (Mt. 13: 33). Gender relations that affirm the equality of male and female both within the Church and society necessitates the use of female and other metaphors for God besides the male ones alone.[26]

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[25] *Ibid.*

[26] Shalini Mulackal "Towards an Egalitarian and Inclusive Ekklesia," in Kuruvilla Pandikattu and Rosarion Rocha (eds.), *Bend without Fear: Hopes and Possibilities*

Though the biblical affirmation of the equality of man and woman is loud and clear, it is not given sufficient expression in our life both in the church and in the society at large. Greater efforts need to be taken to make women more visible and audible in order to make the paradigm shift in gender relationships. The Synod of Asian Bishops seems to indicate the same when they say:

> The Church in Asia would more visibly and effectively uphold women's dignity and freedom by encouraging their role in the Church's life, including her intellectual life, and by opening to them ever greater opportunities to be present and active in the Church's mission of love and service (EA 34: 104).

As mentioned earlier, religion too plays a role in keeping women in a subordinate position. When we come to Christianity, we know that the Pauline writings are often quoted and interpreted to justify women's subordination in the church and society. Some examples are found in the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians (1Cor 11: 3-10; 14, 34-35). These negative statements need to be interpreted in the light of the positive statements of Paul on women. The negative statements appear as responses to some particular problems of local congregations. They should not be considered as theological affirmations valid for all situations. In order to interpret the writings of Paul correctly, one should differentiate doctrinal statements from disciplinary norms and, moreover, keep in mind that both are conditioned by the culture of his time.[27]

One of the positive statement in Paul's letter is found in 1Cor 11: 11-12. Here he speaks of mutuality and interdependence of man and woman. These verses are the climax of the arguments of the whole section, 1 Cor 11: 2- 16. In verses 11-12 we read, "Nevertheless, in the

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*for an Indian Church*, Essays in Honour of Professor Kurien Kunnumpuram SJ (Delhi: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth/ISPCK, 2003), 140.

[27] For a detailed study of Paul's understanding of women in the Church see Rekha M. Chennattu, RA, "Partnership of Equals: Paul's Vision of Women in the Church," in Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ &Rekha M. Chennattu, RA (eds.), *The Relevance of Saint Paul: An Indian Reading of His Letters* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2009), 274.

Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God." This is the first explicit defense of Paul on the equality of man and woman. The phrase 'in the Lord' (v.11) offers the basis for a new relationship between man and woman in Christ. Even in Gal 3:29 we see the same phrase 'in Christ' which is significant. They are not independent in the Lord. "Paul underlines the fact that there is a radical equality between men and women in the Lord as God is the origin of everything."[28]  For Paul, Christian life is an in-Christ-living, which transcends biological distinctions. They are brought to a new life of mutual respect, co-operation and fellowship. In Christ humanity regains the original position, i. e., the harmony that God ordained from the beginning (Gen 1, 26-28).[29] In Christ all are equal. Mutuality and interdependence are the basic norms. Superior-inferior division is the result of the fall. Therefore Paul says that in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman.[30]

Relationship of mutuality and equality between the two sexes is what God intended from the beginning of creation. Hierarchical relationships impede the growth of both as integrated human persons. One aspect of furthering the reign of God in our midst- in our society, in our church, in our families- is to enter into relationships of mutuality and equality not only between man and woman but between any human persons irrespective of their status, age, color, or role.

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[28]  *Ibid.*, 283.

[29]  See K.J. Mercy, "Mutuality and Interdependence of Man and Woman: An Exegetical Study of 1 Cor 11: 11-12," in *Bible Bhasyam*, Vol 26/3 (September 2000): 196-204 at 202.

[30]  *Ibid.*, 203.

# Alternative Patterns of Religious Life and Ministry in the Church Today

## Louis Malieckal

Alternative styles of living the Christian faith include alternative patterns of religious life and ministry in India today. In this study, Dr. Louis Malieckal, CMI, belonging to Samanvaya Theological College, which is an extension centre of DVK faculty, Bangalore, explores this theme from very broad perspectives. This work brings the theological foundations, makes reference to the historical initiates that have place and indicates the future course of developments in India. He argues that the several ashram models, with their specific values of simplicity of life-style, transparency in dealings, communion of members, frugality in spending and solidarity with the marginalized show the way the religious life has to evolve in future and thus to create a 'new way of being Church.' This could be a significant contribution the Indian Church can make to the universal Church in the context of decreasing number of vocations to the traditional religious congregations. In the Indian context, ashrams also offer a new way of integrated religious life (sanyasa) for the celibates as well as for the married people in the third state of life (vanaprastha).

### Introduction

The Council of Vatican II was a historic event, a *kairos* that ushered in the Church a new era of renewal in her life. Pope John XXIII called it a new Pentecost and the main characteristics of this renewal are spelt

out in the first article of the first document promulgated by the Council, namely the Liturgical Constitution. As such these characteristics give us a certain vision statement of the whole Council- event. It reads thus:

"The sacred Council has set out to impart an ever increasing vigour to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more closely to the needs of our age those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call all mankind[sic] into the Church's fold." [1]

There are four objectives in this vision statement:1) to energize Christian life, which needs a return to the original sources of energy; 2) to empower the faithful to move forward with others in the world which requires her to make changes in institutions and life-style without sacrificing principles;3) to translate her faith in Christ into love for one another which increases the spirit of ecumenism and fellowship; and 4) to make her become a powerful symbol of unity and communion which will make her a sacrament of salvation for the whole world.

When we place the Council's vision of the renewal of religious life in the above framework and orientation of its total vision, we can easily discover the foundations on which religious life rests in this new era of the Church. These foundations are 1) that religious life is a sign of the Church, the sacrament of Christ,2) that religious life is a life of witness of the Church in the world, 3) that religious life is a life of communion of the faithful in the Church, and 4) that religious life is a mission-oriented life of the Church. The reason for this centrality of renewal of religious life for the whole programme of renewal of the Church is that "*the consecrated life is at the very heart of the Church*, as a decisive element for her mission", and as such an "integral part of the Church's li⁶e."[2] Therefore *Vita Consecrata* envisages emergence of "new forms of the evangelical life" and "institutions responding to the challenges of

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[1]    *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 1.

[2]    *Vita Consecrata* (hereafter abbreviated as *VC*) 3

our times" and even "*new Foundations* which display new characteristics compared to those of traditional Foundations.[3]

The Council had already opened in a broad sense the door for such renewal of older forms and emergence of new forms of religious life as it prescribed a five-point programme of renewal and up-dating of religious life, which should consist of 1) an honest self-appraisal, 2) creative fidelity to religious charisms, 3) pruning of apostolically antiquated methods, tools, works and institutions, 4) adapting life-style and apostolates to meet the crying exigencies of the people, and 5) boldly launching into promising apostolic openings and areas of concern that call for urgent response from us.[4] During the past five decades, after and under the impact of the Council, we have noticed the change of life-style and ministry of religious life which we shall analyze later. But before proceeding further it appears necessary to have a birds' eye view of the stages and conditions of religious life and ministry in the past so that we can more confidently speak about the rationale and direction of the emerging new patterns.

## 1.  From Monastic Life to Apostolic Religious Life

Historically monasticism pre-dates Christianity by millennia. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Islam (Sufism) all include some form of monasticism, as do Protestantism, Anglicanism, Orthodoxy and some ecumenical Christian movements as well as Catholicism. Prior to the development of monasticism in Christianity there were other non-monastic forms, for example, professed consecrated virginity, lived within the early Christian communities and solitary hermit life in the desert. Although roughly from 500 to 1500 C.E. the monastic form of Christian religious life was the predominant one in the western Church, other forms also came up during this period, especially the military and hospital orders in the early middle ages and the mendicant orders in the high middle ages. But none of these was strictly monastic, because an

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[3]    *VC* 62.

[4]    *Perfectae Caritatae* (P.C.), the document on Religious Life of Vat.II, nos. 2 & 3.

important feature of these new forms was travelling about in the service of one's brothers and sisters in need outside the monastic enclosure.[5]

Monastic stability, fostered and expressed by enclosure and *horarium,* was relativized by these newer forms to allow the religious move from place to place ministering in a number of ways – nursing the sick, sheltering the pilgrims, teaching in the new universities, counseling the laity, preaching in the cities and country sides, converting "pagans" and so on.From the 16th century we find a striking departure from the monastic model that occurred in the clerical apostolic orders, like the Jesuits and the Redemptorists. In particular, the Jesuits decided that reciting the Prayer of the Church in common was not compatible with their apostolic vocation and made the decisive departure from monasticism. Moreover, the monastic habits in clerical orders began to give way to more ordinary clerical or contemporary civil dress or the habits themselves were restricted for use in the house. And simultaneously the residences of these religious were not permanently enclosed monasteries, but temporary houses among which the members could move easily for the sake of their ministries.[6]

Naturally, such a transition and transformation of male monastic life into apostolic religious life had a powerful impact on women monastics who wished to take part in the Church's expanding apostolate. But a number of efforts by male as well as female founders to give rise to apostolic orders of women met with severe opposition from the hierarchical Church, and the Council of Trent re-iterated that all women

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[5]   Sandra Schneiders, "Discerning ministerial religious life today", Source URL:http//ncronline.org/news/discerning-ministerial- religious-life-today, downloaded on Sept.11,2009, pp.1-12 (hereafter, S. Schneiders). It can be seen that in all instances of monasticism, the three unavoidable features were **habit** (whether saffron robes, veils and scapulars, shaved heads…),**enclosure** (monasteries, convents, ashrams..) and *horarium* ( involving chanting of sutras or psalms, or recitation of devotional prayers, common meals, work and the like).

[6]   S.Schneiders,p. 2; see also Jacob Parappilly, "Formation of the Religious: Challenges of Vat.II and Post-Conciliar Times, in Kurien Kunnumpuram Ed., *Shaping Tomorrow's Church*, Mumbai:St. Pauls, pp. 175-199.

religious should observe cloister under pain of excommunication. Briefly, monasticism was the only recognized legitimate form of religious life for women. The requirement of enclosure seriously impeded the development of non-cloistered apostolic religious life among women[7]. It appears that there are stories of extraordinary pioneers of women's ministerial religious life who were denounced for immorality, imprisoned, placed under interdict and even excommunicated; some orders were suppressed while some others were deflected from their founding charisms by re-imposition of cloister. And, despite unrelenting ecclesiastical opposition, they continued to live religious life of their apostolates, and to be accepted and appreciated as religious by the people they served.[8]

It was only in 1900, after its first appearance 400 years ago, that Pope Leo XIII by his apostolic constitution *Conditae a Christo,* formally acknowledged as an authentic form of religious life the non-cloistered apostolic congregations.However because of the struggle over cloister and its attendant customs like habit and *horarium,* women's religious life had developed a hybrid phenomenon,especially between 1900 and 1950, when Pope Pius XII launched the process of renewal that eventually led to the changes following Vatican II. In short, these women congregations carried all the burdens of the monastic life with no leisure for personal prayer, genuine community life, or ordinary recreation of monastics, and also all the burdens of the apostolate without the professional preparation or privileges enjoyed by the clergy. Thus after a period of intensified double life of "monastics at home" and "apostles abroad", in the 1950s Pope Pius XII urged religious superiors to begin modernization of the lifestyle, increased attention to professional and

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[7]    Nevertheless, some founders, like Vincent de Paul and Louise de Mariallac (founders of the Daughters ofCharity), declared their Sisters "not Religious"so that they could minister to the sick and poor outside of cloister. Similarly many others lived as and struggled to be recognized as Religious even while refusing to renounce their vocations to ministry – S. Schneiders, ibid.p.3; see also Jacob Parappally, ibid., pp.180 ff.

[8]    S. Schneiders, Ibid.

cultural education of their sisters, and modification of practices which were unhealthy for sisters or which alienated them from their contemporaries. In particular he encouraged the modification of habits to suit the contexts and conditions of their new ministerial religious life.

Finally, during the Council of Vatican II,the Council fathers like Cardinal Leon Suenens of Belgium vigorously promoted the agenda of renewal of women's religious life. The Council directed congregations to return to the biblical roots of their life and to the founding charisms. These charisms often included the apostolic visions and ministerial intentions of the founders.

## 2. The Council's Vision of Religious Life in the Third Millennium

As "mission is the reason for the Church to exist", and as "religious life is an integral part of the Church's life", ever since Vatican II there is an increasing emphasis on the intimate connection between mission and religious life, apostolate and monastic life,action and contemplation. For the same reason a Conciliar vision of religious life cannot but be part of its vision of the Church in the new millennium.That is why the Council fathers thought of inserting a chapter on religious life in the Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*),and we may say, the Council reformulated religious life as a call to symbolize the prophetic dimension of the Church in the light of the Constitution on Church in the Modern World(*Gaudium et Spes*). This prophetic thrust which, according to the Council, has to be the cutting edge of religious life in the new millennium comprises the following aspects:[9]

### 2.1. *The Horizon of the Church to Expand towards Merging with that of the Kingdom of God*

The religious life and ministry, whatever be its shape and format, has to point to the coming of the reign of God even as it remains fully within the Church. The religious shall take their place on the threshold of the Church, as it opens towards the world with all its uncertainties

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[9]    Paul Puthanangady, *Chosen for the World*, NBCLC, Bangalore, 2003, pp. 31-34.

and ambiguities. As world is the arena of the struggle between good and evil, the religious have to further the realization of the Kingdom by giving faith-assurance in the midst of worldly ambiguities and right direction in the chaos of conflicting interests.

## 2.2. The Religious to be fully Involved in the World, but not Conformed to it

As the Reign of God is constantly being worked out in the world, even as it transcends it, the religious ought to find themselves in the midst of the world, establishing their identity through authentic involvement in its building up process. However the prophetic call of the religious does not allow them to become conformed to its values and principles. The Kingdom of God will emerge unnoticed by human eyes from within through the action of the Spirit; we need only to collaborate with God.

In this mission of the religious, the idea of cloister as isolation needs to be got rid off, and instead, to be understood as an effort to discover the inner meaning of our own life and that of the world. In this perspective religious asceticism becomes a journey towards the heart of the world, and not a flight from it. And then religious life and its varied expressions in communities will be conditioned by the kind of our involvement in the world.

## 2.3. The Religious to Reveal the Divine Dimension of the whole Creation

When the religious experience God as God of unconditional love and try to translate it into loving kindness, this dimension of creation will be revealed. Love is the energy source of God's Reign, which is to be made operative through human love. Through the radicalism of their life-commitment for others, especially the poor and the marginalized, the religious would show that each one is a specific and unrepeatable expression of the love of God.In this way the religious are called to affirm the entire creation, humans in particular, as the sacrament of God. They have to be the prophetic voice of God, who would destroy all the idols that would appear claiming to be images of God.

## 2.4. *The Religious to Realize and Reveal the Pluralistic Nature of the Church*

The Church is at once institutional and charismatic, even as it is apostolic and inspirational at its very origin, and the religious belong very much to the latter aspect of the Church, namely charismatic and inspirational. At this level there is great scope for them to be the mouth piece of the Church through inter-faith, inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue of various kinds. In India some new patterns of religious life in the ashram model provide the suitable platform for this kind of dialogue, as we shall see below. Pluralism in the life of the religious shall manifest the vitality of their consecration. Committed to the love of God they have to become visible expressions of his loving kindness to meet the needs of his own people. This pluralism shall be manifested not only in the plurality of religious congregations, but even in the variety of life-expressions within the same congregation, provided a basic unity of charism can be maintained.

## 3.   Impact of the Council on the Present-day Development of Religious Life and Ministry

As the Council and some of the Post-Conciliar official writings created a more congenial atmosphere for the religious life to grow and flourish according to their original charisms in the service of God and his people, during the past years after the Council, we can find a great number of religious congregations in the vineyard of the Lord assuming a variety of forms and expressions for the sake of doing ministry in the Church. It is true that the Council's impact may be considered in negative as well as positive ways. Negatively seen, the first result is the reduction in numbers of the members of most of the congregations the world over, because of the great 'exodus' of the professed and even some experienced members; second result is the drastic reduction in the new vocations seeking admission to religious life. It is reported,"The average age of women in religious congregations is 69. Novitiates that once burst with young women have merged into just a handful across the country. Congregations that built the institutions of the American church with

armies of sisters now consider a single recruit a decade cause for celebration. There were 179,000 American sisters in 1965, according to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University. There are 67,000 today, most will past retirement age."[10]

Although such a drastic reduction in membership for religious life may not apparently augur well for the future of consecrated life, it may not be proper to attribute it to the Council either. Perhaps the Council's call for reform and up-dating of religious life, relating it to the mission of the Church, has to be seen not as a cause of such an unpleasant and fateful event that shook the entire body of Christ, the Church, but more as a divine offer of cleansing and redeeming the rotten and decaying status of life in many convents and religious houses that was brewing over the past several centuries, mainly due to the medieval and pre-Vatican Church's insistence to maintain the monastic form of religious life bound by the legal trio of habit-enclosure-*horarium*, particularly for women, without any regard for religious involvement in the mission and ministry of the Church.In this sense the Council was a blessing in disguise for a healthy growth of religious life and ministry in diversified patterns with more membership in quality than quantity.

In this connection, what Joan Chittister, a Benedictine sister in America said in her address at the Leadership Congress of Women Religious representing about 95 % of American sisters in their annual meeting in August 2006 is very relevant: "Comparing the 40 years since Vatican II to the 40 years the Israelites spent wandering in the desert,after they had escaped slavery in Egypt", she said,"the sisters need to lead the Church to the promised land. The 40 years had not been the destination, but only the wandering. But like the Israelites who glimpsed the promised land and despaired of ever winning it, preferring to return to the familiar in Egypt, many in the Church today think that safety and fulfillment will be found by returning to the old ways. The sisters'

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[10]  Eileen Markey, "Transformation: Vatican II was only a beginning :radical changes await religious life in 21st century,Source:http://webcache.googleusercontent.com, downloaded on 9/11/2011

mission, is to inspire the rest of the Church to reach that Promised Land, **to be leaven, rather than simply the labor force**."[11]

The more positive impact of the Council on the post-Vatican status of religious life is indeed immense. There has been a real paradigm shift in the understanding of consecrated life as such: Now, it is defined in terms of ministry/mission, even as the Church herself is defined as we have seen above. And since the ministry cannot be conceived and conducted in the air, but only in reference to a target group and a relevant context, religious life has taken different patterns during the 40 or 50 years after the Council, some of them being different expressions of the same charism of the founder, keeping a certain unity in their diversity, while others being forms, sometimes very different from the traditional ones, and sometimes, keeping some internal and/or external affinity and similarity to some traditional ones.

### 3.1. *Mission vis-à-vis Apostolic Activities* [12]

One of the main consequences of the Council's vision of religious life is the importance given to mission, we said; but it is necessary here to make a clear distinction between 'mission' and 'apostolic activities'. We may broadly define it in this way: Mission is a free gift of God, bestowed on humanity through Jesus Christ, through which human beings become associated with God in the re-construction of a world of love and truth, freedom and justice, solidarity and fellowship, assuming the responsibility for the creation of a new society, in which the signs of the Reign of God become visible. In this sense mission is not what we do; what we do should be the expression of mission. On the contrary, apostolic activities in today's language are understood as any good work/ humanitarian work, the authenticity of which need to be verified by referring it to mission. From this definition emerge the following points as its salient features:

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[11]    Eileen Markey, ibid., emphasis added.

[12]    Paul Puthanagady, op.cit. pp.36-38.

1. A 'missionary' in the above sense must be a person capable of detachment from self, which would enable him /her to perceive the will of the Father who sends him/her.

2. 'Missionary action' would be conditioned by and in the interest of the needs of the people to whom he/she has been sent.

3. No 'missionary action'is possible without a genuine 'incarnational involvement', without undergoing the life-experience of the target-group; here it differs greatly from mere humanitarian activity.

4. Mission should have the goal of a total transformation, and a particular apostolic activity/ministry could be integrated into the struggle for it.

5. As mission implies an eschatological thrust, it may go against established institution's interest.

6. Christian mission has a specific orientation to the poor, as Jesus makes clear in Lk 4:18

7. Ultimately mission is identified with Jesus himself (*Missio Dei*) and his message of proclaiming the Kingdom. It is not to be reduced to an invitation to join the institutional Church. Rather it is to be aimed at realizing God's Rule by building up communities of reconciliation through a process of inward conversion of both the missionary and the people to whom he/she is sent.

### 3.2. *Salient Features of Religious Mission*

With the above changed understanding of mission in contrast to any apostolic activity, religious must develop a spirituality of incarnation-inculturation, salvation-liberation and communication-communion.[13]

Inculturation of religious life means a process of cultural insertion following the model of incarnation. It means a radical identification

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[13]   Paul Puthanangady, op. cit.pp.39ff.

with the life-style of the people, becoming one with them in language, food-habits, dress-code, customs and manners, even their world vision as far as possible. All this will make possible easy communication with the people in our evangelizing mission with a view to building communities of love. And such communication at the heart-level will easily lead to communion. This is true of every activity in which our mission is expressed. Though we have no mission to run schools and hospitals, to conduct social action programs etc. and yet these and many other programs can be done with a view to communion, namely to build up human communities, fully living in love. And they will reflect the Reign of God, even if thereby no institutional church may emerge. Besides, total liberation has to be the objective of our mission, and our vows can enable us to achieve this. For, they are symbols of life in a society that is not yet liberated: poverty stamps the things of this world with a spirit of sharing; chastity makes us capable of relating to everybody through genuine love,and obedience makes us dedicate ourselves freely to work for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

### 3.3   Models of Alternative Patterns of Religious Life

In the above paragraphs we have seen that instructions as well as inspiration of the Council that impacted on religious congregations have been largely responsible for renewal of the traditional forms and sprouting of new forms of religious life and ministry. We shall now consider some concrete models that exist in different parts of the world.

### 3.3.1.   Euro Catholic Worker Movement Model/
###            Latin American B.C.C. Model

According to Eileen Markey, the Franciscan sisters of Oldenburg in America are fast becoming a small community of women and men, vowed and non-vowed living on agricultural farm and practicing St. Francis' mission by teaching people about sustainable living. Quoting Sr. Whalen of the community, the author says: "We are not about to get rid of our traditions, but to use them in different ways, adapt them to the challenges we face."

Similarly, Sr. Kathleen Imbruno of the St. Joseph sisters of Springfield, speaking about the challenges of religious life at present, makes the following remarks about their community in future: "The community will include four types of membership. The vowed-for-life-sisters who built the diocese will still be there; but so will women-married or not who go through formation and make a covenant of commitment to the congregation, meet to pray, socialize regularly with small communities of sisters .....There will also continue to exist"associates": lay women who have shared in the life of the congregation since the 1970s. They make three-year commitments, are welcome at community functions and attend meetings and days of prayer with sisters. Finally the "partners in mission"will be people who work alongside the Sisters of St. Joseph in their ministries and are attracted to their charism of social justice, but do not have a formal connection to the congregation."[14]

About the evolution of community life with such different kinds of membership in the congregation of the same basic charism, another Sr. Natalie Cain of St. Joseph observes in this way: "We will resemble what our origins were, where it was small groups of women, coming together for prayer and service where they are called to be....If the community of St. Joseph will look different from the order she entered in 1962 and different from the post-Vatican order where she spent her life, with many members making commitments and covenants not recognized by Rome, Cain is not worried. I guess because in the past there was such a hierarchical model of church, even though we have changed the model, we have thought we had to sustain it. And may be we don't have to."[15]

### 3.3.2.  Indian Christian Ashram Model

Some of the specific characteristics of Indian ashram life which are very relevant to emerging new patterns of Christian religious life may be considered first before we come to the question of alternative patterns of religious life and mission in India. An ashram may be called

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[14]  Sr. Eileen Markey, op. cit. p.3.

[15]  Sr. Eileen Markey, ibid.

a place where primacy is given to relentless spiritual quest through *sadhanas* or specifically Indian spiritual practices, a place where above all, people can experience God and live in an ever-deepening awareness of His Presence. It is open to all, welcoming men and women of all persuasions, religions, status and race, who come in search of peace and enlightenment. The ashram life-style is necessarily simple, an expression of a life of contemplation. Various kinds of service,done from genuinely religious inspiration and as an expression of the relentless search for God, can also find a place there. However ashrams are not primarily pastoral centres, apostolic activities or centres of dialogue. By the very witnessing of their life they proclaim Christ.[16]

There are now in India such ashrams of different sizes and shapes – from solitary monks to communities of *sadhakas*, comprising small or large number of inmates, inter-religious or inter-denominational, men and women etc. Ashram tradition in India as such has three millennia of practical experience and so it has much to offer for the renewal of Christian religious life, which appeared in India only about 1927 [17] and the first Catholic ashram was founded in Shantivanam, Tamil Nadu in the year 1948 and thereafter several Catholic ashrams of consecrated life in a variety of forms have sprung up in India in the spirit of renewal of the Council. These ashrams may be broadly divided into three categories – single hermitage model, cluster of cottages model and community Life model.

### 3.3.3.   General Features of the Models

Instead of describing each of the three, their common characteristics may be noted: In almost all cases it begins as a 'call within call' of the pioneer. He/she was a member of one of the traditional religious

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[16]   S. Painadath, "The Basic Vision of the Ashrams of Catholic Initiative" (Statement of the All India Consultation on Ashrams- NBCLC, Bangalore 7-11 June 1978), in S. Painadath, ed. *Solitude and Solidarity: Ashrams of Catholic Initiative, Ashrama Aikya,* ISPCK,2003,pp.154-157.

[17]   The reference is to the *Christa Prema Seva Ashram*, Pune, founded, by an Anglican priest; later it became an ecumenical ashram.

congregations, like Jesuit, Carmelite, Franciscan etc, made temporary or perpetual vows and/or fulfilled some important office/ministry in the congregation, while entertaining all the time an ardent desire for 'ashram' life for which God leads him/her through mysterious ways etc. Once the search is over and is settled in the chosen form of ashram life, he/she still remains a member of the original congregation, not however bound by the particular observances of it; hence it will be the case of a new expression of the same charism. In very rare cases there may be the case of a new form of the original charism, authentically interpreted according to the context and conditions of the new style of life.

### 3.3.4.    Christian Ashram:Religious Community Life Model

By far the great number of Christian ashrams are neither hermitages,nor cluster of cottages, but communities of few or more members belonging to the same or different congregations, accepting a more or less ashramic life-style and giving importance to one of the three ways (*margas*) in the pursuit of God-realization.[18] Such an ashram is a much less rigidly structured community than a traditional religious house or monastery. . An ashram is an open community, open to all men and women, rich and poor, open to all cultures and religions. There is no other place in the present Church as congenial and fruitful for dialogue and inculturation as an ashram. It is also a house of solidarity and hospitality, where one can always go without prior information. The literal meaning of *athithi*(guest) is 'one who comes without information'. Further an ashram is a model of simplicity and frugality; but it is not a place to idle away time. One must be busy with physical work and inner *sadhana*. As it reduces human needs to a minimum, it is a counter-witness

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[18]    The three classical Indian ways (*margas*) of the search for God are way of devotion (*bhakti marga*), way of action (*karma marga*) and the way of knowledge (*jnanamarga*).   The FMM sisters ashram named Ishalaya in Adyar, Chennai is a clear example for this community model, where Srs. Tara, Mary John, Esther Rani and Rita Susai are ashramites. For more about it ; see Mary John, Kattikatt, "Dialogue with all Faiths: Lived Experience of a Christian Ashram, in *Sannyasa: Journal of Consecrated Life, 6/2(2011)pp.207-213*

to the present-day consumerist culture. This model of religious community life is very close to the early Christian communities.[19]

## 4.0. Prospective Mission Challenges in the Alternative Patterns of Religious Life

As we have seen earlier, in the Council's perspective religious life is an essential and constitutive aspect of the mystery of the Church whose very reason to exist is mission. As the ancient dictum goes, 'as the being, so is its doing also' *(agere sequitur esse)*. Therefore when we speak about the mission of the Church, the Church's life comes to the fore whose one major expression is the consecrated life. And when we examined above emerging alternative patterns of it, it was clear that 'mission' played a major role in this process. In other words, mission cannot be considered independent of the life of the Church or of the consecrated.

### 4.1. Restructuring Religious Life in Terms of Mission

In any attempt at restructuring religious life in order to make it more relevant, mission is the most crucial factor. Let me explain the point, taking a concrete example: in the wake of the renewal triggered by Vat.II, a meeting took place in a traditional religious community with a large campus housing many institutions. Contentious points of discussion were their western manner of eating, using many plates or in a 'spoon and fork culture', custom of having Nescafe with sweetmeats after lunch, and that of having beer-snack before supper on some days. The defenders of these customs and manners objected to falling back into primitive culture if the use of spoon and fork etc. is abandoned; to the loss of siesta and consequent nervousness in the class, if Nescafe-snack is dropped; and to the cause of constipation and similar ailments,

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[19]  Cfr. Emmanuel Vattakuzhy, "I am inclined to explain the mystery of Jesus in terms of Advaita,"in S. Painadath ed.,op.cit.,pp.48-52; see also Sr. Vandana,SRCJ, *Social Justice and Ashrams*, ATC:Bangalore,1982, where she also deals with the social dimension of ashrams, different ways of participating in the struggle for justice.

if beer-snack before supper is cancelled. In the community there was one member who was fully involved in slum-ministry in the city; he was silent all the time while others were debating over these issues. When he was asked by the superior to express his opinion, he replied politely requesting them to follow him to the corridor outside. Standing on this 5th floor corridor and drawing their attention with a sweep of hand towards the sprawling slums beneath the skyscrapers he said. Kindly enquire how many of these hapless creatures, who are really our brothers and sisters according to the "Our Father", we recite every day, suffer from constipation due to their not having beer, how many become victims of neurosis for not having Nescafe-snack after meals etc. I personally feel that this discussion on our meal-habit will be more fruitful, if we would do it after praying the "Our Father" reflectively looking at these slums, if not visiting them. His intervention not only caused a U-turn to the whole discussion, but also radically affected the planning of their future life-style.[20]

Mark 3:15 presents two aspects of our mission-spirituality, a witnessing aspect by our being and life, and that by our apostolates. The first signifies a state of 'ever returning to the Centre' (centripetal) and second that of 'leaving the centre towards the periphery' (centrifugal). The metaphors of tree (*vruksha*) and of river (*nadi*), respectively can explain these two aspects of our mission - life-witnessing aspect and ministry- aspect. And these two are best served by the ashram model of religious life. Ashrams are not merely places of silence, bhajans and religious functions, performed by harmless ascetics, but in the past they have also been centres of radical socio-political movements. The Vedic 'World-Family Ideal' (*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*) and the Gitakara's Righteousness –Establishment Ideal' (*Dharma-samsthapanam*) can be considered as Indian expressions of the Kingdom-Project of Christ.[21]

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[20] Cfr. Dr. IshanandVempeny, "Some Keys to Restructure Religious Life", in *Third Millennium* VII (2004)4,88-97.

[21] Cfr. Dr.IshanandVempeny, ibid. p. 94ff.

### *4.2. Glimpses of a Prospective Religious Identity: A Case Study* [22]

From the earlier discussions, it has been increasingly clear that the call of the Council for the religious congregations to wake up for mission through an appropriate renewal of their constitutions has made its impact to a great extent. Some religious congregations who went through a process of constitutional renewal did not however consider it necessary to abandon their traditional apostolates and embrace other challenging ministries in the spirit of 'option for the poor' of the Council. Such congregations may carry on their business for some more time, not as spiritual power houses but as symbols of the rule of mammon, which would eventually come to ruin .

In future any alternative patterns of religious lives that take shape in the perspective of the Council's call would assume certain characteristics as evidenced by the following case : It is a daring story of one Manju Kulapuram, who joined the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross.

The seed of vocation was sown in her by the "profile of a person sitting under a tree and teaching children of a forlorn village."She could enter the novitiate only after completing M.Sc. and her desire to work among the poor in the village did not find any favourable echo in the novitiate. And so after the novitiate "she had several stints as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal". But all through these years she was not satisfied with her work, and an inner voice disturbed her: "Should I have become a religious just to be a teacher or principal ? Any lay person could be the same as well, if not better."She felt, she was receiving a 'call within a call'. Meanwhile the renewed constitutions of this congregation "bristled with new insights and orientations about religious life,challenged her to the core of my religious existence.I was fully persuaded to believe that God was calling me for a mission that lay outside the ambit of institutional apostolate; I should go to the people in the villages."Having obtained permission from her provincial, she joined

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[22]    Cfr.Kulapuram, "In Search of a New Religious Identity",  in *Third Millennium*, 1(1999)1, 115-119.

the group of two more sisters belonging to different congregations and the trio started staying in a dalit village sharing one of their houses. Later she joined another team that was planning to work among the Santhal tribals of Hazaribag district. The team did not start any ministry of its own choice, instead started staying with the people, visiting villages, meeting people, learning their language etc. and only after six months they chose ministry of education for the following years, as they realized the great importance of it for human liberation, especially in that dalit village context.

Again here, instead of opening parallel schools, the team decided to revive the existing government schools, most of them having neither teachers nor students. The team started as part-timers in two schools which were ready to incorporate them on the teaching staff, and they started showing good results. Having seen the good results and due to the team's tactical approach, the other non-cooperative schools also agreed to work with the team. Thus they could bring out great change in the education of the surrounding villages. Apart from imparting knowledge, the team worked for an integral development of the people of the village: by starting separate Saving Schemes for women and children, reviving the traditional but very effective herbal system of medicine, conducting cultural and sports competitions for the children to make them good citizens, and leaders of the nation etc.

From the above case study we get outlines of the future patterns of religious life: 1) Religious life will change radically in favour of a ministry that is required by particular context and people. 2) Even members of different religious communities may join together to work for this purpose. 3) Traditional meaning of vowed life protected by community confreres will give way to work-oriented functional groups of inter-congregational members. 4) In such groups there may be members at different levels of consecration and commitment etc. To understand the emergence of such a variety of community life in such a short time following the Council, one has to remember the Tridentine period of extreme rigidity and uniformity of religious community life. This sudden change happened not so much because of conscious

decisions about community life but as accompaniments of other changes in religious life such as the diversification of ministry, a sharp decline in numbers, and the breaking down of barriers between religious congregations.[23]

## Concluding Remarks

While summing up the foregoing discussion on 'alternative patterns of religious life and mission', I would venture to dream of their future shape in India, having some of these characteristics. It has been pointed out by Bible scholars that there is a unique parallel between the beginnings of the prophetic movement in the Old Testament and the growth of the religious life in the Church.[24] Both took place at a time when re-discovery of the original spirit as a 'contrast community' of the people of God – the ancient Israel and the new Israel, the Church, was willed by God and executed through his 'chosen hands', prophets and religious. As we are especially concerned about the Church in India we shall briefly touch upon how religious could be prophets in our country today.[25]

1. The religious in India have to make a radical commitment to the poor. Compared to the 1970s through 80s till 90s, when there was in the Church a vibrant sense of social justice, about the last 15 years, are marked by a kind of apathy and indifference to the plight of the poor. The project of globalization in the public sector and the competing self-financing institutions on a large scale in the private sector seem to be the root cause of this malady. At this juncture it is important that the religious opt for the poor with renewed vigour. The promotion of justice must be the primary concern, one that will inspire all forms of our service to

[23]    Sandra M. Schneiders, op.cit.p.236.

[24]    Cfr. F.J.Malony,*Disciples and Prophets:Biblical Models for Religious Life*, Mumbai: Sat. Pauls,1980, cited in K.Kunnumpuram, ed., *Shaping Tomorrow's Church*, St. Pauls"Mumbai,2006,p.386

[25]    Kurien Kunnampuram,ed. op.cit. pp. 386-403.

the poor, turning them to be genuine 'mission' programs, not business concerns.

2.  Similarly the religious in India have to take sides with the subaltern groups. There is an upsurge among the Dalits,the tribal people and the women. It is for the religious to read the sign of the times and see God at work in their upsurge. This 'mission' of the Lord may demand alternative functional groupings of the religious, as we have discussed above.

3.  In the context of growing violence in India, the religious have to be agents of peace and reconciliation.[26] But to work for peace is to be concerned about justice as pointed out by Pope John Paul II, andequally important is forgiveness and reconciliation.[27]

4.  Religious have to work for ecological balance in India and the world, not mere shallow environmentalism for the benefit of humans. This is purely pragmatic, if not utilitarian approach. Instead we need to establish ecological balance learning to live in harmony with nature, based on the awareness of the oneness of life and the interconnectedness and inter-dependence of all things. If we religious work hand in hand with the religious traditions of our land we can do a lot in restoring this ecological balance.

5.  In order to carry out this prophetic mission, the religious have to go beyond mere pious practices, and embrace the spirituality of Jesus, which consists in identification with the marginalized (incarnation) and confrontation with the powerful (cross).[28]

6.  Another aspect of the spirituality of Jesus is 'Abba-experience' which is an experience of God as the basis of human solidarity,

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[26]  Kurien Kunnumpuram, ed., op.cit.pp.391ff.

[27]  John Paul II, "Message for the 1998 World Day of Peace", in Origins 27(1997)p.468.

[28]  See George Soares-Prabhu, "The Spirituality of Jesus as a Spirituality of Solidarity and Struggle," in J.Vattamattam and others (eds.), *Liberative Struggle in a Violent Society*, Hyderabad: A Forum Publication,1991,pp.135-161.

fellowship and communion. And the religious are meant to build and live in genuine communities. That is why John Paul II has reminded them that they are called to be "experts who practice the spirituality of communion....so that communion beget communion."[29] When we talk about community, there is certainly more to it than what can be seen, namely physical nearness; psychological and spiritual aspects are equally important. The traditional equation of community with "common life"is a historical development defined by1917 code of canon law, which is fast changing to new functional forms as we have seen above.

7.    Finally the several ashram models, with their specific values of simplicity of life-style, transparency in dealings, communion of members, frugality in spending and solidarity with the marginalized show the way the religious life has to evolve in future and thus to create a 'new way of being Church'. Here the Basic Christian Community (BCC) model that was originated in the context of the liberation struggle of the Latin American people presents a parallel model on the global level . This model of the Church is not just about the religious dimension of life but embraces the whole human experience of sin as well as grace. The increasing awareness of the structures of sin by this form of the Church[30], has led these communities to raise their prophetic voices against evils of globalization, wars and genocides not only in S. America, but in all other continents, including N. America.[31]

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[29]    *VC* 46.

[30]    The original expression 'BCC' (Base Christian Community) of Latin America has assumed many parallel expressions like SCC (Small Christian Community), BEC (Basic Ecclesial Commnity), BFC (Basic Faith Community) and BHC (Basic Human community), as the movement passed through different contexts of life-struggles in Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa as well as N.America. Cfr. Joseph G. Healey & Jeanne Hinton, ed. Claritian Publications:Bangalore, 2005.

[31]    Ibid. for a realistic assessment of the impact of these communities on the Church and the world at large.

The great Jubilee Year 2000 was the climax of the thrust that began with the Council for a 'new way of being the Church'. For this to happen more and more lay men and women must be encouraged to follow an ashram model of life, and such ashrams will be an Indian version of vibrant Basic Human Communities, the basileic communities which Jesus envisaged around his fellowship table. This could be a significant contribution the Indian Church can make to the universal Church in the context of decreasing number of vocations to the traditional religious congregations. Ashrams also offer a new way of integrated religious life (sanyasa) for the celibates as well as for the married people in the third state of life (vanaprastha).[32]

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[32]    S. Painadath, "Ashram Initiatives in the Church in India", in Fr. Paul Puthanangady, Ed., *Church in India after the All India Seminar 1969:An Evaluation,* pp.135-156.

# Alternative Patterns of Relationship with Nature

## Antony Mookenthottam

Being a Christian today requires of us to develop alternative patterns of relationship with nature. For the dominant patterns remain those of exploitation and subjugation. It clearly violates the Christian attitude of respect towards nature. In this article Dr. Antony Mookenthottam msfs, belonging to Indian Institute of Spirituality, Bangalore, proposes four alternative kinds of relationships with nature in a seminal form. They are holistic, mystical, and relationships based on love and unity, service and gratitude.

### Introduction

Nature defies definitions. Human beings are born into nature with the nature of their own. They can never do away with their nature nor can they live outside of nature. Both exercise mutual influence. Nature and humans are interdependent. In this article we mention very briefly some of the ways by which humans related themselves to nature and then reflect on alternative patterns.

### Human Relationship to Nature

Jörg Splett writes: The word "Nature" strictly speaking means birth, going forth (*nasci, phuesthai*).[1] It is used to designate both the rise of individual being in its reality (the essence as actively realized) or the

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[1] Jörg Splett, "Nature", in *Sacramentum Mundi, An Encyclopedia of Theology*, Vol.4, Bangalore: TPI, 1975, P.171.

totality of all beings in its constant course. This totality is understood either as self-explanatory (in the Greek notion of *phusis* or in a pantheistic concept of *natura naturans)*or as creation.In this article, we use the word "nature" in the Christian sense of the whole creation unless otherwise indicated. Humans have expressed relationship with nature in a variety of ways.

The very first expression of relationship with nature was mythical. The humans were surprised by natural phenomena and nature itself. They sought an explanation for their existence. The answers were given in myth. Indian tradition traced the origin of nature and humans to the sacrifice of the primal man (*RigVeda* 10:90) or to *Prajapati*, the Golden embryo (*RigVeda* 10. 121). Similarly every nation had its own myths. There was also another trend at the same time.

Humans wondered at the manifestations of nature like fire, lighting, the beauty of sunrise, sunset, of trees, plants and flowers. Those gifted with a vivid imagination wrote inspiring poems. Humans of a rational frame of mind were not satisfied.

Intellectuals began to seek the underlying meaning of myths and to speculate on the origin of things. Thus a rational, philosophical approach to nature developed. In the Indian tradition we have the famous Nasadiya Sukta (*RigVeda* 10:129.). The unknown sage, the author of the hymn questions:

Then neither Being nor Not Being was,

Nor atmosphere, nor firmament, nor what was beyond,

what did it encompass? Where? In whose protection?

What was water, the deep, unfathomable?[2] (*RigVeda*10:129.1)

The origin of the whole creation is traced as an emanation from the mind of the Transcendent One in a mysterious way (Rv.10.129.4).[3] The Greek philosophers followed a different approach to nature.

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[2]    R.C. Zaehner,tr.&ed., *Hindu Scripture*(London: Dent, 1972) 11.

[3]    Ibid. 12.

## The Greek Approach

Plato's philosophy had its own character:

> ...Plato's thought implied a philosophy of nature in which mathematics played a role *a priori*, a system of purely intellectual truths to which the description of nature had to confirm quite independently of sense experience or experiment.[4]

Aristotle had a different view:

> In the Aristotelian tradition we meet with very different intuitions of reality. For Aristotle there was no "separate" world of ideas to contemplate. Ultimately all knowledge was supposed to derive from experience, as the thousands of impressions on the senses are processed by the abstracting and inductive faculties of the mind, so that the forms that are inherent in the very objects in nature are brought to light.[5]

Aristotle found that abstraction leads to more general metaphysical principles that can be applied to everything. Among them the notions of "cause" and "effect" can be applied to discover the necessary connections in nature:

> "Any intellectual knowledge" said Aristotle, "deals with causes and principles" and "the object of philosophical research is the cause of the phenomena." A complete account of a phenomenon presupposes that one can identify its material for meal, efficient, and final causes. If there are events to which no cause can be ascribed, they happen by "chance" and fall outside the realm of scientific explanation... this conception of science as a quest for casual explanations has dominated science ever since...[6]

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[4]    Olaf Pedersen, The Book of Nature(Vatican City: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1992) 10.

[5]    Ibid.

[6]    Ibid.

Since then philosophers and scientists have followed various trends in their relationship with nature.[7] Today what dominates is the scientific investigation into nature. There are various scientific tendencies. Some aim at unraveling the mysteries of nature, others to dominate it and still others to exploit nature to gain maximum profit. The wanton exploitation of nature has brought to the fore ecological disaster and the problems of environment.

## Ecological Awareness

Since 1960s, the developed countries became aware of environmental problems. The Bhopal tragedy of 1984 which killed 10.000 people gave a rude shock to India.[8] Still much remains to be done to promote ecological awareness.

The word "environment" may be understood in different ways. In an ecological context it may be understood as nature. It may be understood as the surroundings. Some broadly define environment "as the sum total of all conditions and influences that affect the development and life of all organisms on earth. The living organisms vary from the lowest micro-organisms such as bacteria, fungus, etc. to the highest including man. Each organism has its own environment."[9] In this article we mean by environment also nature and creation.

Though sometimes Christians express a negative or hesitant attitude to the creation, the Bible takes a positive attitude. God willed not chaos but order and harmony in the universe and wants humans to protect and promote it.

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[7]    For Example, Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)., F.W. Joseph von Schelling, *Ideas for a philosophy of Nature as introduction to the Study of This Science,*tr., Errol E. Harris & Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)., Fred Hoyle, *The Nature of the Universe*, (New York: Mentor Books, 1960)

[8]    R.J Raja, *Eco-Spirituality* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1997) 2.

[9]    Anil Kumar De, Arnab Kumar De, *Man, Nature and Environment*(New Delhi: New Age International, 2003) 1.

Hence in the very first verses of Genesis the human beings are called to participate in and continue the creative activity of God as co-creators in so far as they do not disturb, desecrate and destroy the harmony that exists in nature and in all the created realities.[10]

To realize and promote the protection of nature and the harmony in creation, the ecological concerns of several books of the Bible have been studied.[11] Jesus is presented as an ecologist.[12] The biblical approach to various elements of nature is often highlighted.[13] Thus serious efforts have been made by a number of those deeply committed to nature and its protection.Are other approaches possible?

## Alternative Patterns of Relationships

Below I suggest some of the possible patterns of relationship with nature which are alternative to the dominant style of relationship with nature. In this attempt, I just suggest them leaving the scope for further development.

## Holistic Relationship

Instead of addressing particular issues in nature, we must have a holistic approach. Particular patterns of relationship have their own merits. Attention gets concentrated on a particular area of crisis. Efforts are made to remedy the situation. Certainly this is to be continued. However, the advantage of a holistic relationship is that every aspect of reality is taken into consideration and it promotes openness.[14] It fosters all dimensions of relationships.

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[10]  Ibid.          [11]  Ibid., 13-41.

[12]  Ibid. 42-6.

[13]  Robert Barry Leal, *Through Ecological eyes, Reflections on Christianity's Environmental credentials*(Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2010).

[14]  The author of this article has proposed for a holistic approach. Antony Mookenthottam, *Towards A Theology in the Indian Context*, Bangalore: ATC, 1980; "Towards a Philosophy and Theology of Openness" in *All By Love, New Vistas in Theological Spirituality, Festschrift* in Honour of Prof. Dr. Antony Mookenthottam msfs, ed., Jose Maniparambil& K. Henry Jose, Bangalore: TejasVidyaPeetha, 2011, p. 191–197.

## Mystical Relationship and Respect

Nature has to be profoundly respected. For believers it is the creation of God. God's goodness, beauty, love and concern for humans are revealed in nature. Moreover, nature is bristling with divine presence. Hence the relationship has to be one of profound respect and admiration even mystical.The non-believer needs to respect nature as he or she is the integral part of nature. One cannot ignore what is integral to oneself, one's own nature.

## A Relationship of Love and Oneness

As God's creation, there is a natural unity and harmony between us and nature. Nature is as much God's creation as we ourselves are. So St. Francis of Assisi could find perfect harmony between creation and himself.

> For him there was no contradiction and no conflict of priorities: respect for the environment was as much part of the Christian life as helping one's neighbor. Indeed as we see in the *canticle of the sun* he treated aspects of creation as his neighbours and even members of his family. This is a message that we need to re-learn in our day, when we take pride in subjecting the natural order to our whims.[15]

God is love; He loves his creation. Then how can we refuse to love nature?

## A Relationship of Gratitude

Any favour received demands gratitude. Nature keeps us in existence. It feeds us, gives us strength. It refreshes us and renews our life through the fresh air. The primitive people were so well aware of this that they called the earth, our mother. Inspite of all the harm done to nature, it still continues to favor and protect us. So we need to cultivate a deep sense of gratitude to nature. Gratitude must be expressed in deeds.

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[15]    Leal, *Through Ecological Eyes*, p.173.

## A Relationship of Service

From dawn to dusk and from dusk to dawn, nature is always at our service. There is no murmur, no grumbling. Such selfless service demands that we acknowledge it and return service for service.

What service can we do to nature? It is above all a service of preservation, of fostering growth and of moderate use of it. Wherever and whenever possible we are to cooperate with nature in helping creation, animals, trees, vegetation to multiply and grow,and enhance the beauty of nature.

## Conclusion

Varieties of relationship with nature are possible. We should not restrict ourselves to one alone but promote a holistic relationship. Among the relationships, love, respect, gratitude and service are the best and most rewarding, especially when the environment is threatened in many ways.

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